THE PROPOSAL OF JESUS

JOHN A. HUTTON

Central BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

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THE PROPOSAL OF JESUS

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The "Alexander Robertson" Lectures delivered at the University of Glasgow

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CENTRAL BAPTIST SEMINARY
KANSAS CITY 2, KANSAS

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

232.954
H 984

TO THE

Rev. PROFESSOR JAMES MOFFATT,
D.D., D.Litt., Hon. M. A. (Oxon.)

FOR HIS SCHOLARSHIP AND

FOR HIS FRIENDSHIP

2687

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PROLEGOMENA

THE PROPOSAL OF JESUS

PROLEGOMENA

It may well be that analysis of the Synoptic narratives can go no further, until, if such a thing should happen, some document with the appearance of a still earlier origin be discovered. Even should such a truly primitive manuscript come to light, it would not affect the question with which in these pages of introduction I should like to deal. For any new document or group of fragments, which confirmed the story of Jesus as already known to us, or added new incidents and sayings, having, as we might conclude, the authentic note, would still be a selection. And the question would still be unanswered, which is already provoked by the very form of the Gospels as they stand. That question is: on what principle and, as we reasonably proceed, with what motive were the Gospel narratives put to-

gether? By what pressure of conditions—external, from the side of the world, and internal, from the necessity of human beings struggling for an ideal life against the inertia of their surroundings and the treachery of their own nature—did the very acts and sayings of Jesus which have survived, these alone and not others, come to be put together, acquiring from the first a prestige which has secured their immortality?

Our Lord was, so to call Him, one of the busiest of men. "He went about doing good." It was His meat and drink, the habit and desire of His whole being, to do His Father's will. He was no recluse. He was one who rather chose the places which men frequent and even throng. There were times, indeed, when He sought to be alone, with those two or three who were most near to understanding Him, with those two or three, as we should rather say, who must have seemed to our Lord most competent later on to recall and to understand Him. And there were times when He sought to be quite alone, that is to say, with God and His task. But these were incidents —for which there is some faint parallel in every life—in the career of One who on the

whole lived in the open, accessible to His fellow-men. He was to be found in the Synagogue, in the market-place, on the street, so that men could say as He went in and out amongst them, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whom we know?" We read in one place that Jesus rested wearily on a well. Again we read that at one stage He and His disciples were so busy, so eager and absorbed, that they had not so much as time to take their food. "Our Master," said Fisher of Kinclaven in 1733 to a young minister on the day of his ordination, "Our Master was a man of toil, and you are being set apart this day to a life of toil. Our Master so laboured and so gave of Himself that men looking at Him took Him to be a man of fifty when He was only thirty-two!"

"Thou art not yet fifty," said the Scribes; and though I know very well that the words as spoken did not necessarily imply what Fisher of Kinclaven deduced, it was a fine true thing to say, and for my own part I gladly forgive such a lapse in scholarship to a heart that so moves in adoration.

And yet of the ceaseless activities of those three years we have in our Gospels a most meagre record, one which, avoiding duplica-

tions, may be read I know at a sitting of something well under an hour.

And what is true of the "Acts" of Jesus is true likewise of his "Sayings."

Our Lord was one of the most accessible of teachers, eager at all times to communicate with those who came to Him out of any private pressure or tenderness. He could assume, indeed, a remote and withdrawn attitude to those who approached Him with mischief in their hearts, or carelessly. But never did He show Himself difficult or reluctant towards a human being whom life with any one of its many contradictions and grounds for fear or sadness had made humble and simple and real. With a Nicodemus He was ready to spend all night upon the house-top in the hope that truth might dawn upon them both together. However we by carelessness and long habit may have lowered in our own eyes the sacredness of spoken words, in the view of Jesus words were always held to be momentous. In His view the gift of speech, the power to make clear to ourselves and to one another the lights and shadows, the impulses and inhibitions of which in the depths of us we are aware, and to take back into our life the new substance which we

give to those subtle things by speaking to ourselves and to one another about them—all that was in the view of Jesus a delicate and most precious faculty. So greatly did He value spoken words, so deeply did He trace their origin, that by our *words*, He declared, we should all of us in the end of the days be judged.

And yet the entire speech of Jesus, the sum of all He ever said, Who was so open to the approach of sincere and troubled men, we have in a form so selected and reduced that, avoiding duplications, we may read everything within an hour!

S. John, in a hyperbole, declares that if the life of Jesus were fully portrayed, the deeds He wrought, the words He spake, "the world could not contain the books which should be written."

S. John indeed uses that very phrase on two occasions. In one case he adds something: and this something which he adds gives me a point of departure for what follows and may be held to justify the intention of it.

Having declared that there were many other things which Jesus did which are not written in his record, S. John adds, "And these are

written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and believing may have life in His name." That is to say, his Gospel was written for a purpose, in answer—may we not proceed to say?—to some necessity which had arisen, or to repel certain dangers, misunderstandings, seductions, fears. Such certainly is the point of view from which I find myself compelled to read not only the fourth Gospel but the work also of the Synoptists. In a word, the Gospels, as we have them, are so many books of cases—for the control and defence, and for the support and refreshment, of the Christian soul, as the Christian soul had already discovered its various perils and threatenings of collapse in the stress of one and two and three generations.

* * * * *

There is a general principle or law of thought which makes some such explanation likely, if not even inevitable, namely this—that the value of any story of Jesus, of any action of His, or of any word which has the nature of a ruling, lies always in its significance. The *truth* of any act or word of Jesus is surely its fitness to meet some necessity which life and the world have wrought into our soul. We cannot see a thing, in this region of reality,

until we need it. Here we see only what we appreciate; and we appreciate, as the very word declares, only that which we have discovered we even desperately need. When we quote our Lord's words, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you," we are apt to regard them as illustrating "the unconditional freeness of the Gospel." But it is not fanciful, it is only deep and true, to say that those words illustrate rather the severe condition on which truth yields itself to anyone.

I seem to find it everywhere acknowledged and anticipated by Jesus that the things He was saying and doing would not be understood by those who looked on, until—afterwards. He knew, indeed, that He had erected some kind of spiritual standard in the hearts of His more intimate followers—the twelve for example. To begin with, and indeed so long as He was with them, the relationship was not very deep or strong—a kind of personal affection, working in the midst of private ambitions and reminiscences it might be of heroic pages in their nation's history. Jesus was entirely prepared to find that even to the end of His ministry amongst them they would never know what all the time He had been meaning for

them. "It is expedient for you that I go away," He said. It is as though He had said, "You will never know Me, until you miss Me, until you discover, under the later work of life upon you, a blank in your souls which, as you will then perceive, can be filled only by My return to you."

Why do Thy disciples fast not? was asked of Jesus. Why are they so easy, so gay, so unintelligent of life seriously considered? To which Jesus replied in effect: Give them time; wait until the day comes when in some later loneliness they recall this time, as it will then seem to them, of perfect blessedness. There is first that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual. "The day will come."

My point is that the day did come; whereupon, out of various pressures and necessities, out of an approaching despair and the perilous remedies which despair tempts men to traffic in, cries arose, problems and issues reached a height; and that it was to solve these, to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm, to steer the ship on a Galilean Sea of the spirit, that the Church, through the word and testimony of those still surviving who had companied with Jesus, recalled the very bodily form of her Lord and Master—in confidence that if He,

their Lord, Who had been what He had been to themselves, could but draw near to the perplexed, disheartened men of that later day, to those also who, in their fear and long endurance, were beginning, it may be, to trifle with the shameful alternative, it would be with these as it had been one dark night with themselves —there would be a great calm, and near at hand the aspect of a friendly shore.

For myself, I have little hope of any passionate and cordial return to Christ except out of a returning sense of some such necessity. Deep calleth unto deep. Religion when it ceases to be felt as necessary begins to chafe. It is the utter necessity of faith,—the answer, as it seems to be, which it gives from God to some deep cry of the soul for harmony within itself, for self-respect, for deliverance from something which haunts us when we are alone; it is the promise which inheres in faith to deliver us from some straitness or terror,—which flings us on the breast of God.

Much excellent and informing work has been done in our day on the life of Jesus. And a fine thing it has been for us all to be recalled from the metaphysic of the traditional Christian faith and to be confronted with the bodily image of our blessed Lord. It has been good

for us all to follow Him in His earthly life, to be "with Him" for the three years, as He chose the twelve to be with Him, listening. And yet——. One thing I am sure of: it was not thus that the Christian Church came into being. It was not on any mere admiration of Jesus, not on the mere sense of His winsomeness or of the pathos and poignancy of His life, so lonely and brave and fine—it was not on these moods and feelings that the church of the Apostolic age struck root. These had their place later, like the lilywork on the pillar in the house of the Lord. But they were not first. It was not admiration of Jesus, not affection, not mere shame at the dark deed wrought upon Him which let loose that Pentecostal tempest of joy and gratitude and power.

As I ponder the New Testament with the insight which the sufferings of these last years and the present suspense and ambiguity are apt to give, I am very sure that the first outpouring of New Testament happiness—the thing which, rising like a flood, caught in its mighty volume some simple men and made them great—was not this or that in the man Jesus, however tender and rebuking, but some new disclosure—incredible until accepted, whereupon it became almost too much for the

human heart, too astonishing and good—some new disclosure of the Nature and Disposition of God. The Glory of Jesus to those who first loved Him and gave themselves for Him, was, that He was the answer from God to those questions, as they might have stated them in their own dialect, which hang about our minds and, when we are low-spirited, impede us, questions as to our significance in this world, as to the value of any high behaviour, as to whether life in the long run and all the way leads on to a contradiction, or leads on to God.

* * * * *

When serious men find themselves at variance, and at variance upon such a matter—dear equally to all serious men—as this, namely, how with the best prospect our Lord Jesus may be presented to this age and may be brought into relation with the temper of our time—it will be good to remember that on either side we are right and fair in what we claim for our own view, and wrong and unfair in what we deny to the other.

God fulfils Himself in many ways. The Heavenly City has twelve gates, lest any one crowd should boast. And yet the New Testament is explicit, that one enters the state of blessedness always by a narrow way. Per-

haps our fathers erred in protesting that there was only one narrow way, one way narrow enough to keep out everything in a man except his true personality—the way of moral compunction and remorse. But they were right in insisting that no one would see the meaning of Christ until from some personal stress or complication, some sense of failure, some fear or unhappiness such as purged the soul of pride, he lifted up his eyes to Jesus Christ, as the very gift and response from God to himself in that very condition.

In the Parable of the Vine and the Branches, we have what in my own view is the true and catholic relation of the soul to Jesus. That the parable is given in the fourth Gospel, late, that is to say, in the development of the early Church, only adds to its value for all time. I need not elaborate the teaching of that parable. But surely it means this: that the branch is brought into vital relation to the tree not by merely placing the one beside the other. What must happen is something closer and more severe. The branch must be cut until it bleeds, and then it must be pressed bleeding into the trunk which is waiting for it already cut and bleeding. That is to say, it is some-

thing as vital and final and personal as blood in which the soul unites itself with Jesus.

* * * * *

Perhaps I have dealt disproportionately with this matter. My one concern is to show, what seems on reflection obvious, that that lyrical and even abandoned love for Christ which ushered in the Christian era had as its origin and inspiration the faith or conviction that Jesus was the Christ—that Jesus was and is the answer from the side of God to all that questioning and silence and fear which life, without this very faith, soon or late arouses in the human heart, urging it to cruelty as copying life's own method, or, in the finer sort, leading to sadness and to low assents.

I am concerned only to make the point clear that what we passionately embrace we embrace in obedience to something which has become a necessity of our whole being. The general principle or law of thought and action for beings such as we are, is that it is the very pressure of the answer that puts the question. More simply, the question is part of the answer; and any answer is still unwelcome until the question has struggled to the surface.

* * * * *

I wish to say that for myself it has given a

new cogency and authority to the Gospel narratives, to consider them as books of cases, of examples and rulings and decisions, recalled from the actual life of Jesus, on matters of faith and action such as had arisen in the early Church. I find myself asking nowadays, as I read the life of Jesus—some saying of His, some parable, some action, or as in S. John, some grave and deliberate discussion—I find myself asking, "What juncture of events had come to pass, what tendency, what danger, what error or weakness, had arisen calling for guidance or a ruling?" We have no record of such questions as having arisen. But we have no record of the questions which the Church in Corinth submitted to Paul, though that questions had been submitted to him is very clear from the first Epistle to that Church.

In the case of the Gospels it may very well be that questions had not been definitely submitted to the "Council," or to those who were held to be pillars. But that questions had arisen in the early Church is certain, for it was inevitable. Here one may be accused of approaching the study of the Gospels with certain *a priori* prejudices. But there is really no other way of approaching the study of anything human and vital; and those who protest

that there *is* are indeed demonstrating that there is not.

All that I claim is that a society like the Church, a community of men and women contending for and embodying an ideal life in this stubborn world, would inevitably—that is to say, in obedience to certain laws of thought and tendencies and necessary effects of life—come upon moods within themselves, and would encounter oppositions from the side of the world of the very kind which I think I see in the process of being dealt with in the Gospel narratives.

* * * * *

Let me give some concrete illustrations.

We know, from a very large proportion of the entire literature of the New Testament, that for a time—long or short, short as for my own part I think—there was a controversy in the early Church as to the range and proper constituency of the Gospel. The nationalism of the Jews died hard even within the Church. But it died. With what patience and understanding of their traditional prejudice objectors to the Gentile Mission are treated in such stories of that of the Syro-Phœnician Woman, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son; or in that story of our Lord coming upon His disciples

in the grey of the morning, tired and disheartened after a night's fishing in which they had toiled unremittingly and had taken nothing; whom Jesus recommended or persuaded to "launch out into the deep," He Himself going with them; whereupon their own ship was loaded with fish so that they had to call in "another ship," and both almost sank in the waters, so great was their triumph!

Were there people in the Church in those first days also who were saying, "Have we not heathen enough among the Jews, and about our own doors?" for whose sakes these stories of Jesus were recalled. For what in such stories is the appeal and thrust to any human heart not yet past feeling? Is it not the very voice of Jesus asking those half-Christian Jews precisely what Jonah had been asked: "What is God to do when people want to come back?" Nay, "What is God to do towards people about whom He knows, even before they themselves are conscious of it, that they are in need of Him?"

* * * * *

Then, again, how much of what we have in the Gospel narratives acquires a new meaning when we remember that those to whom and for whom they were first prepared were at the very

moment suffering persecution under Nero or Domitian? Alas! the very word persecution, like the word crucifixion, has by long use been robbed for us of its brutality and agony. But the life to which Christians of the first two generations were called was a bloody business. It is when we remember that it was so, that many of the Gospel stories, sayings, appeals, start up from a page which had become merely familiar and tame. But how it must have helped those threatened men and women who purposed to be faithful, to be told that Jesus had foreseen their sufferings and had appealed to them "before those things come to pass that when they do come to pass they should still believe!" And so, in how many words and stories from the lips of Jesus are they appealed to, to stand fast, not to lose heart, or curse life or deny God. How they are told that anyone can *begin* to be faithful; that the test comes later; that he is the faithful servant who can endure until the end! For already something which we call doubt had begun to threaten; otherwise a great mass of New Testament material is without relevance. "Where are the signs of His coming?" hard-bestead, suffering men were beginning to ask. Was it for their sakes that a parable of Jesus was re-

called and embodied in the Gospels in which their Master doubtless foreseeing their very case spake once upon a time? How He had likened Himself to one who goes away and promises to return. The time of His returning He does not give; only that He shall return He assures them. He prepares them also for the possibility that His return may be delayed. It may be in the first watch of the night—from six to nine, as we should say. But it requires not much faith or strength of soul to watch from six to nine. Many are awake at such a time for poorer reasons. But it may not be in the first watch that He will return. It may not be even in the second watch—from nine to midnight, that is to say. But, though it takes more faith and character to bear up through the second watch, still, for some corruptible crown, for some prize of the world, men will keep awake as long as that. Besides, at such an hour, late as it is, there are lights in other windows and life is not quite cold and solitary. But the servants of this Master may be asked to keep a longer watch—even from midnight until three in the morning. To watch through that season of the night, when all nature seems to die, when no light is burning but our own, when enthusi-

asm fails and mocks us, when all high views of life seem incredible and ridiculous, through such a season to stand fast, through such a season to continue to hope, to be able to dispense with enthusiasm and all secondary supports, and to rely solely and utterly upon the fidelity of this One who has given us His promise—"Blessed is the servant whom His Lord when He cometh shall find thus watching!"

* * * * *

I used to wonder why, although the New Testament is most reticent concerning harrowing things, concerning facts and aspects of that heathen world for example, on whose squalor Christ fell like light, nevertheless almost one half of each Gospel is taken up with nothing else than the story of the sufferings and of the death of Jesus. I used to wonder why those very Apostles who are so reticent about their own sufferings should report in such detail the sufferings of their Master. We are not spared a single incident which might augment and drive home the sense of our Lord's loneliness and, so far as the world could produce it, His desolation. His betrayal by one of His own disciples; His arrest by the stupid mechanical hands of foreign soldiers; the bandying of Him about from one place to

another; the denial by Peter, though at the time when the story was first read Peter must have been one of the great figures of the Church; the smiting on the cheek; the bearing of the Cross until He sank under it; the nails, the laughter, the thirst, the desolate cry; we are spared nothing.

I was told as a student that this fulness and detail were designed to repel the heresy of the Docetists! I think not. It has become my own conviction that that record is what it is, and that it was circulated for no other purpose than to cut off the retreat back into the world of every Christian soul in whom the sense of honour had not died; so that every man and every woman of them should say: "Here I am and here I stand. I can no other, so help me God."

LECTURE I

"The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy"

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"The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy"

THE thesis which underlies these studies is that Jesus had a definite solution—which He offered in firm and precise language such as the leaders of His day in Church and State came to understand very clearly—for the actual situation, a situation which He perceived, unless a totally new temper came over His own people, would end in a tragic and inevitable disaster. His proposal was rejected; and the disaster which He foresaw overtook His country in the sack of Jerusalem in the year 70.

In the case of people like ourselves, it may lift the whole matter above debate that Jesus, who obviously had pondered deeply His proposal to the men of His day, firmly believed that the cordial acceptance of that proposal would have subdued or would have diverted certain passions and misunderstandings which were everywhere massing and mounting to a crisis. But fair and serious students who may

hesitate to accept the political insight of Jesus as final, will be led, I believe, by a close and sustained examination of the phase of things there and then, and of the proposal of Jesus, to perceive that it was the one way by which relief might have come. In the course of those thirty silent years which led up to His first public act —when He stood by the side of the Baptist at the Jordan, the proposal of Jesus had become to Him a conviction or revelation beyond all dispute and final. When at length He opens His lips in public He affects us as One Who sees His way. How His proposal shall be received by His contemporaries is perhaps at the outset unknown even to Him: though there are grounds in the record of the early days of the Ministry for inclining to think that at the outset and for a season our Lord was not unhopeful. There is the spirit of the morning about the Galilean days which could only have arisen and maintained itself on the belief that in His view it was not yet too late. That morning sky, however, soon became overcast. There was a day when our Lord perceived that His proposal was being resisted, and would at length be definitely rejected, by those who controlled the national policy. There is evidence that this possibility had been before

His mind from the beginning, and that He had settled with Himself what action He should take were His proposal finally repelled.

When we ponder the story of the Temptation in the Wilderness—a story which the most subtle mind known to us in all literature (I mean Dostoievsky) pronounces to be by every token an authentic piece of autobiography, and the most luminous fact in the long history of the human spirit—we can perceive that Jesus had before His mind certain alternative lines of action in the event of His proposal drawing upon Him the hostility of the leaders of His day. But even at that stage in the conflict of principles within His mind, Jesus affects us as One Who has already given His word once for all to His own soul and to God.

A day came, as we know, when it became quite clear to Jesus that His fidelity to His proposal would lead on to His death. I believe we can now and then overhear Him dealing with that prospect and at length overcoming the fear of it. A day came when He gained a still greater victory over the prospect of His death; for souls of the rank which approached to His rank have for the most part faltered not at the fear of death—at its pain or at the difference which it makes; they have

become suddenly disheartened and weak and sad over that insinuation of futility which death seems to cast with a leer at all our human bravery. But a day came when Jesus triumphed over that disabling innuendo, when He grasped with an exultant mind the metaphor of the grain for which what we call death is but the condition and occasion of fertility and a career. We can see—for surely this is the permanent meaning of what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration—the light of a mighty illumination clothing Him and filling His heart with a joy intolerable except in a life of unreserved self-devotion—that by dying in fidelity to this Proposal which had become for Him the whole wisdom and power of God He was taking the very way—and if the world remained hostile and impervious, the only way—of settling that proposal for ever and ever on the mind and conscience of the human race.

To those who are familiar with the Old Testament and who have laboured sympathetically with its ultimate and enduring ideas, it will not seem a strange or unlikely thing that our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom that entire system of ideas culminates, should in His earthly ministry have been preoccupied definitely and

precisely with the public questions—the politics in fact—of His day. That religion has nothing to do with politics is a proposition which is contradicted on every page of Holy Scripture. Indeed, if you give the highest and most beautiful meaning and content to the word "politics" which that word is capable of bearing, it will be nearer the facts of the matter to declare that the one concern of the Old Testament is with politics. If a pagan could say, laying claim to something fine, "I am a man, and nothing which affects mankind do I regard as of no interest to me"—how much more naturally do we look for such a sentiment from a representative of that great tradition—Jew or Christian—which claims to surpass in severity and in value the teachings of mere human wisdom? Open the Bible anywhere—its history-books, its prophecies, or those soliloquies, those dialogues between the soul and the Unseen Power who deals with us in the processes of the Natural World, and in the events of history, and in the secret pressures and amazements of our individual soul—I mean the book of Psalms—open the Bible anywhere and what you find is never for long any merely personal distress, but some protest against human conditions, some prediction of the overthrow of the

works of wicked men, some promise, passionately adhered to in an unheeding age, that harsh and cruel things which have been going on in this world far too long shall one day encounter the public indignation of God.

It ought not to make any honest man uneasy to learn that the religion which he professes insists on taking to do with his behaviour as a man and a citizen. We need none of us have any fear that the Bible or Christ will be found on the whole to support the party to which we do not belong. The politics with which the Bible deals, with which also as we shall see Jesus most directly deals, is a politics above parties, and resting solidly upon certain principles. The political principles and maxims of the Bible, like those of any thoroughly good man, are very simple. Severe, of course, they are, and ready in a moment to oppose us in any mere fondness or prejudice of our own. But this is the necessary severity which obedience to any ideal will demand if it is to survive in a mingled world like ours. My point is that the political insight or sagacity of the Bible is, above everything else, simple. There is a thing which is right, and there is a thing that is wrong; and our very business in this world is to increase the rule and realm of what is

right. Of course, *there* men differ both as to the methods and as to the intermediate or secondary ends towards which they are tending. With regard to methods and intermediate ends, the Bible leaves us free. It is the function of the Bible to hold up a strong light—whose source it declares is in God—a light by the help of which any honest man may read even the small print of his own heart, and may know how in the region of his intentions he stands related to all that is good and fine. If he will still advocate and pursue a course which he knows the spirit of his religion condemns—why, the Bible for the time being will leave things in that position. For the Bible deals with us always as free, as having the power to choose and take our own course. It has nothing more to say to a man who holds down the truth in unrighteousness, who knows, that is to say, what he should do and does otherwise. But the Bible, or rather, we should say, the God of the Bible, on the one hand, trusts that men will not for ever go on acting against their own private sense of what is right; and, on the other hand, the God of the Bible knows that the wrong things we do, the wrong policies we advocate or adopt, sooner or later, but always at length, achieve their own overthrow, en-

countering certain principles of nature and of the inveterate human soul which arise like God's bodyguard when wrong things threaten to go too far. And on the whole human prospect the Bible has such confidence in the final moral strength of the Universe, that it has a kind of pity for people, whether as individuals or in masses and communities, who, having been so far indulged, begin to presume. In its own robust way the Bible describes God as laughing at men and states trying, as we might put it, to get the better of Him.

There, however, I must recall myself. The one point which I was concerned to make good and obvious is that it is a thing not to be wondered at—if we should find that it is so—that Jesus, concerning Whom it was said by one who stood near to Him, that His testimony is the spirit of all prophecy, should have seen into the very heart of the national questions of His day, should have perceived also relationships and consequences for the whole world of His time in the attitude which the Jews might adopt; and that He Himself in no vague or mystical way, but with a definite and urgent policy, should have taken action, with the view of eluding a catastrophe which He saw to be impending, and to provide a formula of faith

and of social method which should and—as He declared—alone would save the human race from the recurrence of crises in which men's passions and prejudices work themselves into hard knots and into a maze of entanglements, when the only course seems to be to make a sweep of the whole thing with a knife or with a hatchet, unravelling the knot indeed, but undoing also in that moment certain fine and laborious achievements of the human spirit, and letting loose those primitive impulses which man shares with the animals, impulses which, since in the case of man they are mixed with reason and imagination and inventiveness, make him when he abandons himself the most dangerous of all the beasts of prey.

I think we have suffered, and in recent years have suffered everything on the large scale of events, because in all kinds of ways the Western and professedly Christian peoples seemed to have taken it for granted that Jesus Christ and the religion which He founded had nothing large and final and urgent to give men in the way of guidance upon actual controversies and public questions. Christianity, in fact, had come to be regarded—and is still by great numbers regarded—as a system really of psychology, a system which deals with delicate

and subtle things of the soul: these delicate and subtle things—fears, hopes, misgivings, and the rest—Christianity made much of, made indeed everything of; and upon *them* as upon a pin-point of most precious insight, it built up a kind of inverted pyramid of inferences and of destinies. Now there was, and there is, truth in all that. Such a summary or understanding of Christianity served its controversial purpose, for example, against the exclusive claims of priestly hierarchies, and, if the danger ever seriously threatens us again, once again we shall have recourse to some such way of escape. We shall say that religion is a lonely thing between the soul and God, in which a mediator who would restrict our intercourse is not to be tolerated: that man may meet in the bush with God. It is of value also against any merely mechanical theory of the human career such as would depress man's personal life, suggesting to him that in the whole terminology of the spirit he is deceiving himself. But whilst it is true and indeed is the only truth to say that religion is a lonely thing between God and the soul, we must take care not to mean that therefore religion is something which is to *remain* within the soul, a remote and lonely thing, unrelated to life and to

duty. If students will look back upon the characteristic work of German thinkers on matters of faith during the last generation, I believe they will find that it was precisely this restriction of faith which left, even upon our minds who read their books with eagerness and expectation, a certain feeling of disappointment in practical outcome. As against materialism men like Eucken and Hermann were of enormous assistance—expounding as they did the position that the thing by which finally men live is something which has its source and motive in a region deeper and earlier and more authoritative than the intellectual faculty: that, as Mr. Balfour put it, all great movements are irrational. But in the writings of such men as Eucken and Hermann there is left upon our minds an idea which in itself is a disabling and disheartening one, namely this idea, that with regard to the religious life which has its birthplace in the soul, it is perhaps better and wiser in the long run that it should be kept to the soul—a silent, altogether personal and incommunicable secret. But such an idea in course of time makes of the Christian life a merely private luxury; and though for a season such seclusion may be a safeguard to finer spirits in a world which from time to

time may become too coarse, it is never to be indulged for more than a season, and even in its time of retreat faith must ever be laying its plans for a new and more sagacious invasion of the actual world of men and things. For whatever be the case with other peoples, we Anglo-Saxons will continue to demand of our religion, as we demand of our literature, that it shall add to the force of life within us, that it shall send us out with the insatiable hope that the world shall yet become the harmonious context and surrounding for this deep thing which in our souls we embrace as truth. We perceive that any interpretation of the Christian faith is in fact a form of self-indulgence, and indeed is akin to the grosser self-indulgences which men justify to themselves when they despair of the world—unless it can accept the hearty rule that the one business of Christianity is that we proceed upon it.

It may be necessary from time to time that men of faith, one by one or in groups and communities, shall withdraw themselves from any direct interference with the affairs of the world. It may have been that the discoveries made by scientific research and the implications of these had induced in men of a sensitive faith something like a shudder of misgiving,

inflicting a wound on the human heart which demanded quietness and attention. But even if such were the explanation, the time for retreat would now do well to close. Already in more sensitive minds which were the first to fall back in the name of the soul from the face of life, there is a new reaction towards daring and adventure, the older reaction having its supporters for the most part nowadays in those on the one hand who have never accustomed themselves to think deeply about life, and in those who, foreseeing that any new world when it comes will come over the prostrate or dishevelled body of the existing order, are quite intelligibly afraid.

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For the fact is, Jesus Christ came into this world—in His own view—with the very purpose of submitting to mankind a programme for life, in the name of God. The politicians of His day tried to win Him over to their side. And He was put to death, when all is said, because He adhered to His programme as the only public policy which would have saved the Jewish nation, had it been adopted, and the only policy which would save the world—for it would establish in the world saving and reconciling ideas of God and of life—even if

His countrymen should put Him to death for His unbending faithfulness.

We have all suffered, and suffered in every region of our life, from the neglect or from the depression, until it has sunk lower than the practical horizon, of this aspect of the whole meaning of Christ for the world. It is more than an aspect of that meaning; it is, I am going to contend, the very substance and essence of it.

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I suppose we are all agreed that it is a poor function which we concede to Jesus Christ, and one which is entirely out of proportion to the passion and tragedy of the New Testament, that He should become for us merely the exponent of certain lights and shadows which haunt the souls of most sensitive people; or that His religion takes to do *only* with invalided spirits; that it is—and this has often been an explicit charge—a religion for slaves, for those who have failed, for the weak and the disheartened, and for those whom life has insulted. There is a sense in which all that is true and the very blessed truth; for life ultimately is a tragic business for every man, and in the last resort we Christians must meet it one by one—with such guidance as we find in

Him. But we make less of Christ than He claimed, and we place the accent wrongly, when we do not see that He had something to say to the world of a positive and intelligible kind. That something which He said to the world in the language of His own day and of that world, and face to face with the national policies and the impending social problems of that day, *still stands,* and still represents His Mind and what He accepted for Himself as the Mind of God and the final ruling upon the conduct of human affairs.

There were, to say it again, in His own day, and there always have been, serious people who would have preferred to keep religion apart from life's circumstances and conditions. But such an ideal is really a pagan one, and leads in course of time to superstition. It would be the same thing to suggest that we should confine our personal Christianity to the Sunday, or it might even be to the Sunday morning, and not allow it to overflow into the affairs of the Monday or the Tuesday and the other days, or, indeed, into the affairs of the Sunday afternoon, especially if the day be fine. But the whole conception of religion as a thing-in-itself, out of relation to a man's active and natural life, is false and mischievous. To

conceive of a man as built with a system of bulkhead compartments, one of which is devoted to religion, having no natural and cordial control over the other compartments, is already to have made of religion an idol, whose place is in a corner, and not, as it must be, master of the house.

When we read the New Testament with care, approaching it with a free and bright intelligence, we discover everywhere proof that the impression which Jesus made upon His contemporaries was something very different from the picture of Him which we allow to hover like light smoke about our minds. We are apt to think of Him as, above everything else, a victim of life—and the literature of devotion makes use of the phrase, the Sacred Victim; that His gentle Soul was affronted by a gross world; that His beautiful ideas, being in advance of His time, led Him to endure the alienation of friends, and at the last the anger and brutality of coarse unfeeling men. And yet, somehow, that is *not* the impression of Him which an honest reading of the New Testament makes upon us.

Let me illustrate how very differently they thought and felt about Him who met Him face to face.

There was a day when Herod became aware of Jesus, of the kind of things He was saying and doing in the region over which Herod ruled. The things which Herod is reported to have heard about Jesus are what we should call strong things, the kind of things which come from the same lips as later on shall speak of Herod as "that fox." When Herod learned of these things, and when the men round about him were giving him their various renderings of what it might portend, Herod said suddenly: "It is John the Baptist risen from the dead!" That is to say, a contemporary and a very able man, with the additional acuteness of one who is concerned for his own interests, hearing of the kind of things that Jesus was saying and doing, in a moment associated Jesus with that incorruptible man, that chip of the old block of Hebrew prophecy, with that man who had withstood him (Herod) to the face, because he had been guilty of a public indecency. That was what Herod thought of Jesus—that He was John the Baptist over again; one of a class of men of whom this strange Jewish race seemed never to be without at least one representative—who will spoil everything for men like Herod, and who will speak the "odious truth."

It is the same impression which we get from such a scene as that in which Jesus, seeing the money-changers in the Temple making money out of the agony of men's souls where the worshippers were sincere, or helping the frivolous worshippers to deceive themselves—in any case invading and defiling the sanctities—overturned their tables and flung them out into the street.

But, for myself, one of the most subtle and unconscious, and, for that reason, one of the most authentic admissions as to the moral force and aggressiveness of our Lord's presence and activity in His day, is made in an incident which one might easily miss. On the night on which Jesus was betrayed, Peter, on being challenged by a servant, denied even with oaths that he knew Jesus. After Pentecost this same Peter was one day preaching at a street corner (as we should say) when the authorities asked him to move on, and to continue his business (if he would persist in it) in some quieter place. But this Peter, who so recently had behaved like a coward, has now become a man, and replies with fearlessness, using words that fall like the strokes of a man supporting henceforth all honourable souls:

"Nay; but we must obey God rather than man."

Whereupon we read—as though the inference had leapt invincibly to their minds—"they perceived that he had been with Jesus." They caught in the voice of Peter and felt in his moral effrontery something the like of which they had known in His Master.

This is all to say that Christ is wrongly conceived when He is thought of as having come into this world to found a cult or to reveal some mysterious and esoteric doctrine—in any case to work in a corner. He came to inaugurate a world-state-of-matters, having as its ultimate motive and principle God, and the very God who had worked His way into the conscience of the Hebrew people in the long agony and illumination of their history.

It is not true that He had no definite policy to meet the situation which confronted Him, a situation which He perceived to be on the edge of disruption and terror. There are those—and in recent years they included many thoughtful students—who hold that, looking out upon the world of His day, Jesus saw no hope or outlet for things except by the way of a world catastrophe. These declare that in the view of Jesus things had already acquired

in His day such a head and volume—wrong things, bad things, religious bitternesses, nationalist passions, all within an atmosphere in which the ethical and holy view of life had been lost—that it was now too late to contrive anything that might avert a catastrophe. That the age to which He had come was about to be submerged in some huge disaster: that, therefore, it was idle to suggest anything practical or to guide public policy for the sake of a world which was on the point of passing away.

Just as there may be good and devout people in our own day who might make use of certain selected sayings of Jesus in order to excuse themselves from taking any active part towards the easing of problems which are embarrassing the world at this moment. These might say: "The last days have come. The best thing that could happen would be that the present world should pass away. Let us meanwhile cherish our own souls. Let us defend from the rude contacts of the world our own dear hopes. Let us make in our own souls in these blinded days a place of quiet and welcome for our blessed Lord Whom the world has once again rejected."

And yet, though that is a natural reaction in fine and sensitive spirits face to face with

a world of disorder and heedlessness, and though we may quite justly yield to it for a season and in measure, nevertheless it must never be welcomed or indulged as the normal and final or habitual attitude for Christians one by one, or in the mass: and it is not the attitude which, as a matter of fact and history, Jesus adopted in His day.

It is true that the scene into which He came —whether we estimate it from the point of view of individual character or of national peace, or of world-wide moral order—the scene into which He came was one of most sinister possibilities. But it is the Master-Glory of Jesus that, alone among the sons of men of whom we have any record, He saw a way by which, even though the hour was late, the world (in the sense of the world of His day) might be saved. Especially did He see a way by which His own people, the seed of Abraham, might be saved. He saw, and to begin with hinted, and at length proclaimed, a definite policy by which His own people would at least be spared, by which the disaster would be avoided which overtook them in the year 70, when Jerusalem was sacked to the accompaniment of horrors which even after the horrors of recent years of war still make

dreadful reading. He saw a way, and proclaimed it; and, resisting all seductions such as are symbolised in the story of the Temptation in the Wilderness, held on—though there was a day when He perceived quite clearly that the way He had accepted as God's way for Him would lead through Gethsemane and Calvary, and would involve for Him the drinking of a bitter cup, and the nails, and the awful thirst.

"He came unto His own and His own received Him not." Now when we say of anyone that he came unto his own, we mean not simply that he came in person. We mean that he came, speaking their language, ready to deal with their wounds and with their fears, ready to meet them round about that very point or issue in which life presented itself to them as wrong or senseless or unjust. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." These words are, in the first instance, not theological, not mystical, not even religious in the narrow or accepted sense. They deal with the historical fact that Jesus came to His own people with a definite public and social policy, with what I have called a proposal: and they rejected it. It was not

that they did not understand the meaning of that proposal. It was that they did understand it. But they perceived that it was a proposal which was asking of them what God by the mouth of one of their seers had asked of them when he appealed to them to make "their God their glory." It was a proposal which was taking them back to their own Isaiah and Jonah. It was a proposal which was asking them to take one short step indeed, but it was a step across their own hearts, planting one foot upon prejudices which had their roots in a thousand years and stepping out into what seemed to them a void and empty place, though to Jesus it was a step across the threshold into the final kingdom of God in this world.

It will be our business in what follows to make clear to ourselves what the definite public and social proposal was; and what was involved for the Jews and for the wide world —for the world of ideas and the life of the human spirit—in the historical rejection of that proposal.

One thing I foresee. It is this: we shall be dealing with things which are not by any means ancient and remote, things which indeed

have even an uncanny appropriateness to the crisis before which at this very moment all the nations of the earth stand, one may say, uneasy and afraid.

LECTURE II

"Jesus Came Into Galilee Preaching the Gospel of God"

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So far we have been engaged in clearing our minds of certain prejudices. A prejudice is an attitude of mind which once upon a time we assumed for reasons which at the moment we supposed to be sufficient; and later we have been too indolent or too obstinate or too vain to find out whether this attitude of ours is still sound and honourable and the best now that we are older and know more—more about ourselves, and more about the thing in question, and more about life.

One prejudice with which we felt it necessary to deal is the idea that our religion has nothing to do with public questions, with politics and social solutions. Of course, it is admitted even by those who hold this view that indirectly and as a consequence religion cannot but influence secular affairs; but these hold that this is a by-product and not the true aim. To this we made the reply that, on the

contrary, the religion of the Bible, culminating in the public ministry and message of Jesus, insists upon taking to do with what we call social and public questions. The position might indeed be put in this way: the one and chief concern of our religion is to save the world, this actual wild and teeming world. Our religion, however, sees that in the long run this will be accomplished through men and women who themselves are "all out" for this high and difficult business: that it takes a soul to move a soul, and something more than mere nature, and something more than mere good-nature to dispose men (to quote Mrs. Browning) to move even into a cleaner sty. And so the Bible, and this quite finally in the message of Jesus, comes round to the individual, and frankly confesses that God can save the world only through the saving passion of erect and sensitive souls.

That is to say, if Christianity, even from a very early time, almost from the beginning (though quite clearly not at the very beginning), found itself compelled to deal with individuals, with people one by one, such a fact must not be allowed to distort the true and complete intention of Christianity which is not first, and not merely, to save individuals here

and there, but to found a Kingdom of God, a new world-order.

It is our neglect of this precaution which has laid the Christian religion open to the charge made sometimes mischievously, sometimes passionately and honestly, that it is a self-regarding system, concerned exclusively with bringing comfort or light to individual souls; that it is apt to become selfish and otherworldly, as though one should say, "Thank God, *I'm* all right." But a human being who can be quite happy because of his own personal feelings and securities, while there are unhappy people round about him, he meanwhile doing nothing to bear or to remove the unevenness in human lots, is not a Christian after the pattern of the New Testament.

I do not think that this kind of thing is so very common. I believe that where it exists it is for want of thinking. Want of thinking is, of course, no justification: and it was our Lord Himself who said that at the bar of the final judgment the profound test which would be applied to us one by one would be to answer, not why we had done certain things, but why we had not done certain things. I do not think you will find many to-day who are satisfied with a Christianity which ministers only

to their own personal comfort. It is not for me to say it boastfully or as though I were satisfied with things as they have been amongst us, but still it is a fair challenge to make that at this present moment the real work of the world, the protesting, appealing, recalling work of the world, is being done in the name of Christ.

Of course, those who hold that this world of ours has in itself no real value for God, that it exists merely as a place for testing and scrutinising human souls whose real business is hereafter and elsewhere—those who hold such a view can hardly avoid taking up towards the problems of such a perishing and unreal world an attitude of indifference or of contempt. There have always been such people, and I do not wonder. It was John, the disciple who leaned on the breast of Jesus, who wrote to some faithful minority, "Beloved we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the Devil." For this world of ours does, from time to time, assume such an aspect that people of a fine grain are tempted to leave the miserable business to take its own way to perdition. And if Jesus Christ had not come into the world expressly to forbid such an attitude, I do not see

how finely-constituted people could for more than a time have resisted some such a mood.

But temptations of that kind will reappear and will be dealt with in their proper context later on. And now, to proceed.

Let us take "S. Mark," which is our most primitive account of the life and work of Jesus. Observe how S. Mark introduces Jesus. What is the fresh and individual thing that S. Mark has to say about Jesus? What, in short, is the first word of description which we have in history of this One whose Person and Experience have, as a matter of fact, become the basis of the public and the private conscience of the Western World? "After that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God." The Gospel of God! That is a very remarkable phrase. The Authorised Version translates it "the Gospel of the Kingdom of God." The Revised Version, with strictness and accuracy, puts it that "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God." I repeat, it is a startling phrase, so fresh and unusual that we may be sure it was the only proper and inevitable word for the thing that had to be described. The basis of the teaching of Jesus, and of that very teaching which later was to lead Him to the

Cross, and still later, through the interpretation given it by the Cross, was to become the moral Light and Conscience of the world, was —the fact of God.

At this point I can imagine someone saying to himself, "Ah, once more we are going to be sidetracked! We are in for theology. But it was not theology that we were promised. We hoped to learn something about the Relation of Jesus to the public questions of His time. And now we must listen to some tedious and abstract matters that have no practical bearing upon our actual life." But it is surely fair to begin where Jesus began: and Jesus began with God. Now that is laying the axe to the root of the tree. That and that only is, I hold, getting to business. Far from being unreal and unpractical, *that* is the most concrete and decisive thing in the world. What does the whole thing mean? What are we, beneath the surface, fundamentally, at last? What's the use? And again—with regard to certain alluring voices—why not? Yes: the moment you sit down and try to help on things, you are embarrassed and in confusion until you have some idea as to what everything means to you, or is going to be made to mean to you. You must begin with some theology,

or with some no-theology. For it is life and death which compel us to think and think until we find some meaning which enables us to deal with the one and to look the other in the face. Jesus began with God.

And that, I repeat, is the most practical thing in the world. For how can we set out unless we know where we are going? And how can we begin to build unless we have an idea and a plan? How, in fact, can we begin to build until we have somehow in our minds the whole completed edifice? For to build is not simply to put one stone upon another anyhow. To build is to put one stone upon another and alongside a third, and so on, but all in harmony with, and subordinate to, a controlling plan and a remote completed purpose. It may very well be that some humble builder has not with his own eyes seen the very plan. It may be that he, poor man, could not understand such a complicated affair even if it were put into his hands. But the humblest builder knows that there is a plan somewhere, that somebody has thought out the whole thing, and that, unless the world has gone crazy, he is not being asked to move blocks of stone or brick or wood for the sake of giving them a change of air; that, on the contrary, the little

thing which he is being asked to do is related to the little thing which his fellow-labourer is doing, and that to other labours in ever-widening circles, until something which shall unite and consummate all those individual tasks shall have been enacted in this world.

In the early days of the war, the output of the men in our shipyards was greatly reduced; and the explanation was given that men became disheartened to see their work torn up and scrapped in order to carry out some new plan such as actual experience had shown to be necessary. I am not blaming anybody, but I can well believe that some such result would follow. For it would seem to the workmen that they were working for nothing, and in obedience to no considered plan.

When we look firmly into the processes of our own minds, we perceive that there is a sense in which we have an idea of *everything* before we begin *anything*. Our idea or doctrine of everything may turn out to have been wrong or unsound; but it was not so obviously wrong or unsound as to make what we set out to do seem at the moment ridiculous. Before we set out we knew where we were going. Perhaps we knew at the same time that we ought not to be going where we were going.

That is another matter. My point at the moment is that there is a sense in which we have already come to a conclusion about our whole venture before we launch out upon it. We see the end before we begin. We know where we are going before we set out; unless indeed we are, as we say, out merely for a walk. But in this life of ours we are not out merely for a walk: we are on a journey. And a journey implies already a destination, and, please God, a welcome at the end.

Much of the sorrow and confusion of the world in these days spring from the neglect of this piece of wisdom or from the repudiation of it. We are too proud to accept heartily a predestined purpose. We want to think that we are having our way, and that what we are doing is our own. We say things shall be as we intend, whereas the fact is things shall be, in the long run, as God will. But we need not be surprised at the present confusion when what we perceive is that men, classes, nations, have not stated their final purpose and ambition. They have not stated what in the long run it is that they are after. For what you think of the entire business must affect all the intermediate steps.

Of course, at this point someone might

intervene and say, "Stop there, is not that unfair?" and might proceed: "I am one of those who have what is called religious doubts. I should like to believe more than I do. Meanwhile I see something in this world, something in human conditions which is wrong, unjust, cruel. Surely you do not mean to suggest that I should do nothing with regard to those things before my eyes which I feel to be wrong and unjust and cruel, until I have thought my way to some solution of the ultimate meaning of life!" To which I reply, My dear friend (for any man who is in honest difficulty about life I welcome as a friend, if he will allow me), I mean nothing of the kind. On the contrary, you admirably illustrate what it is I am after, and the point which you have raised may help me to make myself quite clear. You ask me whether you are to stand idle, suppressing the best feelings of your heart and conscience, face to face with things that are wrong, unjust, cruel, and to remain idle and silent until you see your way clearly as to the nature and existence of God? I say no! Go on, and at once, to deal with those things which seem to you wrong and unjust and cruel: for the fact is you already have satisfied my conditions. You say, what do I mean? I mean just this.

You call certain things in this world and in human conditions wrong, unjust, cruel. But why do you call anything wrong, unjust, and cruel? Is it not because such a thing comes into conflict with an idea of what life is (of what God means life to be—if you will allow me to express myself in my own way)—an idea which is already in your mind. In fact, you illustrate precisely what I mean when I say that no sane man sets out until he knows where he is going, or begins to build except to a plan. But *you* know what it is you are making for: you are making for a world which shall not harbour or defend things that affront the conscience of mankind, or affront the conscience of good men. You have seen the plan; and in setting yourself against the wrong, unjust, and cruel things, you are working for the sake of something which you see by faith, and as the great thing for which we were created, namely, a system of human arrangements from which what is wrong, unjust, and cruel, shall have been driven or shall flee in shame.

In short, we are agreed. And all that remains is for you and me to go on with our thinking; for me, as representing the Christian tradition, to remind myself that I am using vain words if I talk about believing in God

while at the same time I do not try to bring into existence a world which shall seem more like God's world; and for you as representing serious people in general to go on and on, from merely protesting against wrong things to the invoking of right things, to go on and on until it comes home to you, as it will, that the thing which you were really after all the time is the thing which Christians have always been meaning if they were worthy of their name, the thing certainly which Christ meant: the thing you are after in protesting against wrong, unjust, and cruel things, is the bringing in of that kingdom of God which was Christ's very programme.

I am sure that it was this, the necessity for making clear to ourselves what it is we are after in all our plans and policies and protests and prayers, what it is we are after in our discontents and revolutions and legislations—I am sure it was this that was in our Lord's mind in that simple story of His about building upon a foundation of rock and building on shifting sand. If you want to build something which shall endure, you must build it fair and square upon something which has endured, upon something which is not affected by the weather or by the winds of changing human thought.

And so He began at the beginning which is also the end: He began with God. And once again I say, far from this being remote, ethereal, unreal, vague, useless, it was and it is the only genuinely practical way.

For I cannot imagine a more disturbing and incisive issue than the issue which you force to a point in men's minds when you speak about God. Of course, I know that in our day, as in S. Paul's day, "there are gods many and lords many." But still in our day, as in his day, we might go on to say that for us there is one God, and that one God is He whom Jesus Christ called God and Father. We must begin somewhere. We begin there. And beginning there, I cannot conceive a question which will so swiftly penetrate men's words and immediate policies, and reveal or expose the true intention of their spirits, as will this question: Do you believe in God? I am not using the language of the schools just now. I am meaning something as plain as human speech can be. Do you believe in God in this sense? Do you believe in those attributes and qualities which Jesus declared to be the attributes and qualities of God? Do you believe in God; as I might ask, Do you believe in goodness, in kindness, in truthfulness, in per-

sonal honour? Do you believe in these things, and, to that extent, in Him in whom, according to the theory of faith and according to the explicit word of Christ, all these things reside as in their natural home? And do you believe in these things—these things of God, these things belonging to God, in this further sense, which is inevitable if you are honest, that you desire these very things to come into their kingdom here in this world? That, I say, is *the* question: in the long run it will decide and resolve everything. Let men come to terms there, and they will see their way through the darkest forest. Wherever a prejudice, or an interest, or a passion is admitted to be in conflict with any one of those radiant attributes of God—that prejudice or interest or passion must be pruned off. Such pruning will lead to the shedding of blood. But there again our Christianity will help us; for it prepares us for the otherwise dark saying that without shedding of blood no good thing can ever be established on this earth. There are, however, two ways in which blood may be shed as the condition of human progress. It may be shed in anger, from wounds dealt bitterly by the hands of men. Or it may be given freely, as Christ gave His blood, in

victory over every contrary spirit. One day in Manchester, in the depth and utmost stress of the war, a soldier who had lost an arm was standing with a friend of mine, when someone joined them. "Well, old man," said the newcomer, "this war has taken it out of you. I see you have lost an arm." "Oh no," replied the fine fellow, "oh no, I *gave* it!"

And why did he give it? Or how was it that he felt that his arm had not been torn from him by an enemy shell, but had been given by him freely, as a man might put an offering on the communion table. He gave it, and he felt he had given it, because his action or his suffering was in harmony with that very life of God which leapt into light and into the familiar knowledge of men in the life and passion of Jesus. He could say that he had given his arm and that it had not been taken from him, precisely as Jesus could say and did say, "No man taketh My life from Me. I have power to take it up, and I have power to lay it down."

And why could both Christ and that humble and happy servant of His say such a thing? They could say it because they believed, both of them, that by their deed they were helping to make possible and no longer incredible, first

a group of human beings, then a larger group and a still larger, and finally an entire world and federation of mankind in which such heroic love would be no longer an astonishing incident but the chosen and accepted behaviour of the race.

* * * * *

"Jesus came . . . preaching the Gospel of God."

I hope I have not failed to make clear what so far I have wished to establish in our minds. The first word of Jesus on the human affairs of His time—was to declare the reality and necessity of *God.*

Perhaps it is only now, and after we have seen what we have seen, that we are able to understand how absolutely and finally right our Lord was there. There are hundreds of things on which, it may be, we all differ. There is one thing, I think, on which, to-day, serious men are agreed. That one thing is this, though there are various ways of putting it: We see now that until people in their conflicts and controversies have some common platform discussion can never move towards unanimity and friendliness. I do not and ought not to mind conceding *my* prejudice, if I am a Chris-

tian, and if you can show me that my prejudice is against God as Jesus revealed God.

We see, too, that there is something wild in man until it is brought under control; that until there is established in the general life of man a kind of court of honour, external covenants and contracts will chafe men and they will be rid of them. For without faith in God life urges us in various ways on to bitterness.

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And then, once again, and to conclude this line of thought; until we see life all within some fine and beautiful purpose—such as is secured by faith in God—we are at the best but struggling in the dark. We cannot go together, because we are going different ways, or we don't know where we are going, or we even wonder whether it is worth while going anywhere.

For myself I see no way of refreshing this world with energy, and of guiding its invincible natural vitality, except by moving forward—for surely it is wrong to speak of a *return* to faith as though faith were something less energetic and adventurous than the range of mind to which man has already attained, as though in his acts of faith a man were shrinking from the face of life—by mov-

ing forward to some all-embracing vision of our life and fortunes which, with a new understanding and passion, we shall hail as God, before Whom we shall all agree that our personal purposes and our public policies shall stand or fall.

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I sometimes think that in a great, wholesale way we are all of us about to make a wonderful discovery. At times it seems to me as though we were on the edge and moment of a world-shaking Revolution in thought and mood. For a long time now we have been feeling our way in a vast, unlit corridor, contending with others in the dark, striking out at shapes which seemed to be wishing to do us harm, when all the time they, like ourselves, may only have been out upon their business, and, like us, in the dark. I sometimes think that in answer to the cry of our present distress a light is once more about to shine: and by this light we shall see again an open door, and beyond the door the fair earth and sky. I sometimes think we are all of us on the point of making the discovery that our Christianity is true, and true in the sense which alone gives to truth its majesty, and to those who have received it their passion and their patience, namely, in

this sense, that for mankind to oppose it or to neglect it, is for mankind in the long run—and a long run is needed for the testing of principles—to rush down a steep place and to perish.

LECTURE III

"Behold I Have Set Before Thee an Open Door, and No Man Can Shut It"

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LET me recall the two points which, we shall assume, we have so far made good. In our first study we claimed for our Lord an eager and immediate interest in the public questions of His time. It would have been strange indeed had He had nothing to say and no guidance to give on matters upon which His countrymen in various groups and under various leaders were deeply and angrily divided. It is a presumption that Jesus was intervening *quite pointedly* in public matters, and was *felt* to be intervening, that almost from the outset of His public ministry the authorities had their eye upon Him, at one time—before they understood the real drift of His teaching, rather encouraging His popularity with the people; later, becoming suspicious and uneasy; until at last, having decided that the solution which Jesus was advocating would supersede and discredit their own nationalist dreams,

they set themselves deliberately and persistently to entangle Him and make Him guilty of some word or action such as would call down the Roman power upon His head. In other words, we may infer that our Lord was felt by His contemporaries to have something to say upon public affairs, and something which was likely to lead to changes in the political fabric, from the circumstance that the local authorities soon became alarmed and took measures to crush Him. We are right in supposing that had our Lord's mission been simply a mission of comfort to the more tender souls of His day, had He been satisfied with recommending to those who cared to listen, some poetical and unworldly interpretation of the harsher incidents of life, the authorities would have let Him be, regarding Him, if they should give the matter a moment's thought, as one of those innocent and unpractical visionaries who do no harm, who indeed rather assist the designs of cynical politicians by keeping the masses quiet. It was not for saying the beautiful things which Jesus said that the leaders of the nation put Him down: it was because they came to perceive that behind those aggressive acts of His, as when He threw down the tables of the money-changers

in the Galilean Court of the Temple, and behind those denunciations of themselves, which left them naked and ridiculous, there was something of the nature of a principle, deliberate and considered, which, if it were once to acquire head and volume, would bring in a new world, and one with a basis and tendency very different from what was in their minds; indeed, the very contradiction of what was in their minds.

So much we recall from our first study.

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For our second study, and as marking a further step into the mind of our Lord, we took the words from S. Mark's Gospel with which that Evangelist brings Jesus upon the stage: "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God." And what we were trying to do was to recover for ourselves something of the freshness which those words must have had for those who first heard or read them. "Jesus came preaching the Gospel of God." What we said was something like this: that far from it being an unpractical and idle contribution to any public question to declare the reality and supremacy of God, nothing really and in the long run is practical and thoroughgoing in comparison. Let men once come to

some common understanding as to God—as to the fact of God and as to the nature of God —and all those problems and policies which divide us and set us against one another are already on the way to being solved.

For the question which lies behind all our policies and ambitions, if we are honest with ourselves, is the question: What do we think of life? What does it mean? Or—since that will always be a matter of debate and dubiety —What are we ourselves proposing to make of life? What is it we are after? What kind of place would this world become, and what kind of place would it now begin to become, if we, you, I, as by the wave of a magician's wand, could have our will? If we had the power, what would we make of the world? That, I say, is the question; and although, superficially considered, it may seem to be one of those questions which can wait, one of those questions which come later and at the last, the very contrary is the true state of the case. Here most certainly the last is the first.

In the days, some twenty years ago, when Mr. Chesterton's hearty faith came to the rescue of so many sad souls, there was a saying of his which I treasured, and which I celebrate to myself as often as life threatens to lose for

me its deep simplicity. "When I am consulting a landlady as to rooms," says he, in effect, "I do not ask what are her terms, and so forth; I ask her 'What is her total view of the Universe?' " For, he means of course to say, If she is right there, she is right everywhere; or if, holding this ultimate faith, there is anything in which she turns out not to be quite right, it must be only a mistake, an error, something that will be acknowledged and amended the moment you bring her practice under the challenge of her own avowed principle.

For myself, I find nothing better than that. And I do not scruple to say that it was the same insight and philosophy which lay behind everything in our Lord's message, first to His own people, and beyond them to us all.

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As I get older I tend more and more to urge this way of dealing with ourselves, as to our private beliefs and ambitions, and also as to our political and public behaviour. I do not ask a man "Do you believe in God?" in the sense "Do you believe that God exists?" Nowadays I should rather ask, "Would you like to believe in God?" Were I to ask a man in these days, "Do you believe in God?" I should like to adopt a tone as though I were

asking, "Do you believe in goodness, do you believe in being kind, forgiving, loving?" Similarly, I do not ask a man, "Do you believe in Christ?" in the sense, "Do you believe that He is all that the Church has ever said about Him in its theology and language of devotion —as to His nature, His relation to the Infinite Power which may be supposed to preside over human destiny?" No: I rather incline to ask a man and to ask myself, "Do you believe in Christ?" with something of the immediateness and reality with which I might ask, "Do you believe in so-and-so?" naming someone known to us both. I intend now rather, "Do you believe in Christ?" in the sense, "Would you like to believe in Him?" Or in the sense, "Are you ready to decide to stand up for Jesus, in the welter of your own moods, and in the confusions of this present world?"

Certainly, when one asks me whether I believe in any Ideal Thing, or in any Ideal Person, I know that I have no right to say that I do, unless at the very moment when I say so, I am actually obeying and serving that Ideal Thing or that Ideal Person. I know that I must not say I believe in an Ideal or in an Ideal Personality—like Christ, or God, if what I mean is merely that I assent to or do

not oppose the proposition that that Ideal Personality may conceivably exist. I must mean that just now, at this moment, in my most private life, and in the whole intention of my behaviour as a man, as a citizen, as a medium of the world-process and an instrument of the future, I am regulating myself, judging myself, recovering myself, as seeing this Ideal Personality—though meanwhile He is invisible; nay, though meanwhile under certain aspects of the world He is incredible.

I can give an illustration of these things from the position of a great Ideal which is beginning to brood over the conscience of the human race on our day, an illustration which will do me the further good service of taking me right into the heart of the conflict which was raging in our Lord's time, and of indicating His own precise message with regard to that conflict. Some time ago a letter appeared in the public press, a letter from the Prime Minister to the whole country. It was about "The League of Nations." The Prime Minister announced that the League of Nations was indeed about to be embodied in an international statute. It was, that is to say, going to be set down in black and white, attested to by the responsible heads of the great peoples

of the earth, that henceforward the nations shall submit matters which in the old days might have led and did lead to international bad feeling and to bloodshed, to some common and accepted Court of Authority, the decisions of which Court those nations pledge themselves severally and collectively to accept.

But the Prime Minister goes on very properly and very gravely to remind us all that the League of Nations, like every Ideal, like every formula of Faith and Hope and Love, like the Kingdom of God—of which it is an echo —The League of Nations is a thing of the Spirit, to be cherished and defended in Spirit and in truth. The League of Nations is not a thing-in-itself, not a place, not something which exists and shall exist apart from actual men and women and the actual moods and impulses of living human beings. The League of Nations—a harmonious and confederated world—is something which will always be in danger, something therefore which will always need to be defended afresh, the necessity for which will always have to be remembered, the horror of the alternative to which will always have to be recalled by historians and by poets, and by the memory of the ten millions of dead

and the ocean of blood which are the awful monument of the other way.

And so, when anyone asks us whether we believe in the League of Nations, our answer must be "Indeed I do"; not meaning "Yes, I believe such a thing possible and good and fine," but meaning, "Henceforth I am in for it; I am going to work for it; I am going to help it on; I am going to change anything in my personal ambition which keeps me from heartily wishing it God-speed. I am going to use my influence as a citizen so that my nation shall never cultivate feelings or commit itself to policies which would jeopardise the great affirmation—that it is the bounden duty of mankind to live by reason and justice, and even to stretch reason and justice to the point of faith and kindness."

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I am thankful for such a contemporary illustration of a principle which is indeed the principle of religion and of Christianity. I am thankful for anything which helps people to see that the matters with which our faith deals, are matters which come home to us all, and lay upon us all an immediate and an enduring task.

The illustration, however, at the moment

serves me further. This very idea of a League of Nations comes extraordinarily near to the idea which inspired and controlled everything in our Lord's ministry to the world of His day. Indeed, there is a day coming, I verily believe, when the title "The League of Nations" shall be erased; and by the unanimous vote of the human race there shall be inscribed over the erasure the deeper and more logical, as it is the more beautiful designation—no longer "The League of Nations," but—"The Kingdom of God."

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I do not know anything nearer to the whole fact of the matter than to say that our Lord came into this world preaching the Unity of mankind in God; and inaugurated that prospect as the very task and business of all who in every age should come to believe in Him.

In what follows I shall try to show that this, and this alone, is the inevitable explanation of what happened round about Jesus, and of what happened in the depths of His own soul, as we are permitted to trace the deepening struggle there—until the end is reached when, as His enemies supposed, they were done with Him; when, as Jesus radiantly declared, He

finished the work which the Father had given Him to do.

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We know almost nothing of Jesus, until He comes upon the scene at the age of thirty. But from that moment He always affects us as knowing quite definitely what it is that He has come into the world to say, and to do, and to be. He comes forward and stands openly by the side of John the Baptist. He insists upon being baptised by John. That is to say, He publicly associates Himself with all that the Baptist stood for. Now, the Baptist stood for the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. The first public act of Jesus, therefore, was to take His stand on the side of Prophecy, on the side, that is to say, which regards religion as a living expression in contemporary conditions of the mind and nature of God.

To put the matter in our own terms, our Lord associated Himself with the Baptist in interpreting religion as personal, social, ethical; and that it is through the ethical appreciation that man arrives at true ideas concerning God. Those who adhere to this view of religion, that it means goodness, and goodness of a kind which, on the whole, men everywhere understand, are apt to come into conflict with

those others who tend to confine the operations of religion to certain places, which are therefore called sacred, or to a certain nation, which is therefore held to be the peculiar people of God. Truly good men on one side and on the other are able to escape the danger of bitterness over this difference: but some of the saddest chapters in history deal with this very conflict between those who regard religion as bound up with an institution, and those, on the other part, who regard religion as a spirit.

It is another of the natural and unconscious traits of our Lord's insight and fairness that He did justice to both views, agreeing, on the one hand, that the spirit of God creates institutions and that for a time the institution defends and gives effect to the spirit, while at the same time warning the representatives and guardians of the religious institution that the function of every institution, of every church, of every sacred day, of every dogmatic statement and the rest, is not to keep truth to itself, but to become that home and residence from which truth sallies forth eager and unafraid to deal with friend and foe out in the world.

We are all of us familiar with our Lord's ruling on the observance of the Sabbath: how He lit up that whole question and every other

similar question in the saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Similarly, the chosen nation exists for the whole world, not the whole world for the chosen nation. God revealed Himself to the Jews as He had not revealed Himself to the world; but this with the intention not that the Jews should make a secret of God's revelation, and not that the Jews should become proud and contemptuous of peoples that had not the Law, but with the intention that the Jews should regard themselves as trustees of something sacred and beautiful and necessary, for the behoof of the entire human family.

It was the enunciation of that principle which first aroused and afterwards inflamed the ecclesiastical and nationalist politicians of His day, and led directly to our Lord's death. And it was our Lord's clear insight into the truth of that principle, and His conviction that obedience to it was the only way of escape from the immediate tragedy into which the Jewish state was rushing in His day—it was this insight and conviction which steadied our Lord when easier ways offered themselves to His tired Spirit, and which enabled Him out of the agony on Calvary to cry: "It is finished," meaning, as we must mean when we are an-

nouncing the triumph of a principle, "It is vindicated."

In short—and having made the one point clear we shall not go further now—the issue between our Lord and the leaders in church and state of His day was this: our Lord declared that God is the Father of the entire race of man, that He has no natural favourites, that He has no respect of persons, that *God loves the world.* It was the beginning of the end for Jesus and the burning of His bridges behind Him, when He took His stand on the saying, "God loves the world," putting the accent not upon *God,* and not upon *loves,* but upon *the world.* To this the leaders of His day replied: But how can that be? Is not the whole story of God's dealings with the Hebrew people proof that that people stands in a different class in the eyes of God from all the peoples of the world? Did not God call Abraham to be the father of the faithful? To which our Lord may be said to have replied: It is true that the entire history of the Hebrew people is the story of God inviting them to do something, to become something; it is the story also of God enabling them to do this thing undisturbed by any lower ambition. But what is the thing which all the time God is asking

His people to do, and is enabling them to do? It is there we are at issue. You have allowed yourselves to read into God's dealings with you a certain caprice or partiality. You quote to Me: "An Ethiopian ready to perish was my father, and the Lord made him a great people." But ought not the deduction from that historical fact to be not that *therefore* you are superior to all other peoples, but surely rather this, that the same God who took the "Ethiopian ready to perish" and made of him a spiritual people, is able to take other nations that are ready to perish, and make them also His people? You call Abraham your father, and yourselves the children of Abraham. But what is Abraham in the Eternal mind of God? Abraham, we read, heard God's voice calling him out from his own home, out from his accustomed securities, out to face an unknown future. You have misread the entire story. You have misapprehended the meaning of it. In the sight of God, Abraham is not the father of the Jews: he is the father of the faithful. Abraham is the father, the patron and type, of those who at the call of God *set out,* and who are ready to go with their faith and their insight into the whole world, and to share their faith and insight with the whole world. They

are of the seed of Abraham who are of this outgoing spirit.

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Here let me recall the story of our Lord's treatment of a Canaanitish woman who came to Him asking help. The entire incident is one which in my own view is, from the moral standpoint, indefensible and unintelligible, until we see it within that interpretation of our Lord's Mission to this world with which these lectures deal. Let me read the story:

"Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew into the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon. Here a Canaanitish woman of the district came out and persistently cried out, 'Sir, Son of David, pity me. My daughter is cruelly harassed by a demon.' But He answered her not a word. Then the disciples interposed and begged Him, saying, 'Send her away because she keeps crying behind us.' 'I have only been sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel,' He replied. Then she came and threw herself at His feet and entreated Him; 'O Sir, help me,' she said. 'It is not right,' He said, 'to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' 'Be it so, Sir,' she said, 'for even the dogs eat the scraps which fall from their master's tables.' 'O woman,' replied Jesus, 'great is your faith. Be it done to you as you desire.' And from that moment her daughter was restored to health."

Now I know very well the ingenious and laborious and entirely unconvincing reasons and explanations that are given in order to remove from our minds a certain natural and

instinctive dissatisfaction with this story as it stands. It is said that our Lord was not sure, at the woman's first appeal, of the reality of her faith, and that He purposely put difficulties in her way so that she might fall back before the face of these difficulties into a sullen acquiescence in her lot, or that her faith might be heightened or deepened by these very difficulties into an agonising cry. A horrid idea! One also which bristles with theological difficulties as it does with moral, for it would attribute to our Blessed Lord something far removed indeed from the Divine Charity which will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax. But the fact is, once we see the incident in its proper light, the whole thing becomes luminous, and Christ emerges from it His own consistent Self.

"A Canaanitish woman came to Jesus,"—an outsider, that is to say, not a Jew, not an heir of the promises of God in the view of those who interpreted those promises narrowly. This woman came to Jesus. " 'Sir, Son of David, pity me. My daughter is cruelly harassed by a demon.' But He answered her not a word."

Then we read, "The disciples interposed and begged Him, saying, 'Send her away because she keeps crying behind us.' " The dis-

ciples did not mean "Bid her begone; chase her away," for that they could have done of themselves. No, they could only have meant "Lord, give her what she wants." But our Lord still withheld His hand. And why? Was it that He Himself did not see His way as to what He should do? Never! Was it that He was not sure that this woman had some kind of theological equipment which we call faith, and that until He was sure of this He could not or would not say the word which would comfort this distracted mother, who was only asking that relief should come to her sick child? Impossible! Nay, almost blasphemous! How then are you to interpret our Lord's silence and delay? Only in one way, I hold. He was leaving the woman's question to burn its way into their Jewish hearts who were looking on and listening. He would not interrupt the controversy which had now begun in their spirits; the controversy as to what a man is to do who will still call himself a man, and what God is to do who will still call Himself God, when human weakness and pain appeal for a deliverance which man or God can render.

And when our Lord did speak, what was it He said? "I have only been sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." Now these, I

firmly hold, are not His words at all. They are, so to speak, a quotation to be read within inverted commas, a quotation embodying the prevailing temper of their Jewish minds. It is as though He had said: "Well, but you know if I help this woman I shall be acting in contravention of all that you Jews believe and protest. If you really mean what you say, you mean that this woman, because she is a Canaanitish woman, is not eligible for the charity of God. That is to say, God, in your view, can close His ears and is right to close His ears to any appeal that comes from any human heart if that human heart is not a Jewish human heart."

But the woman came on again, and threw herself at His feet, and entreated Him, "O Sir, help me." It is as though she had said, "I don't know anything about your political and ecclesiastical differences. I am only a woman, and a Canaanitish woman. I know nothing. But I am a woman and a mother, and I have a child and she is delirious. O Sir, help me." And Jesus replied—and I think it must have cost Him almost as much as the agony of Gethsemane—"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Is there any man living who will try to con-

vince me that Jesus said that, meaning every word of it? Were I convinced that Jesus said that, meaning every word of it, I should have to close my New Testament and go out into the darkness. No! He never said that, meaning it. Once more He was holding up a mirror to the soul of His own Jewish people, and to the soul of their representatives, His own disciples, Jews every man of them. It was as though He were saying: "You see how these principles of yours work out. It is one thing for a rabbi, sitting in his study, to develop with a horrid intellectual consistency some doctrine about the necessary exclusiveness of God; but it is another matter to apply that doctrine to life, to life with its pathos and its agony. How do you feel just now with this woman crying out for help which I could render—which you know I could render—but which I am forbidden to render if I confine Myself to the people of My own race? And how do you think God feels when a cry like this woman's reaches His ears? Can your theory of God, compelled by some document to confine Himself to the Jews, stand this assault of human weakness? Can you yourselves stand this assault; can you bear this any longer?"

And the woman's voice sounded again over

the silence and tension of their souls: "Be it so, Sir," she said. "Dogs we are, hungry, beaten dogs; but even dogs, though they may not presume to what is spread for honoured guests upon the table, are still permitted to pick up the crumbs that fall." At which Jesus could no longer restrain Himself. He had kept up His self-appointed pose, as Joseph did for a little while before his brethren, but at last outpoured His heart. It was as though He had said, who never needed to ask forgiveness of anyone: "Woman, forgive Me. O woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you as you desire."

Now that was the issue which our Lord raised in this world. That was the question which our Lord put to the Jewish people. It was the question which God had put to them in the Book of Jonah. It is this: What are you to do, what is God to do, if an outsider comes in the name of sheer human necessity, and asks for a share in the love of God?

It was when this dawned upon S. Paul in after days, outside the Damascus Gate, that he was blinded with the sudden and amazing inevitableness of it all, and overwhelmed with shame at his own moral stupidity. No wonder we read that he dealt with himself with indig-

nation and revenge when at length he perceived that this Jesus—Whom he was persecuting in the name of a Judaism which he perceived now was a caricature of God—that this Jesus was the only true Jew of them all.

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So our Lord habitually spake, and always in correspondence with His words He acted. He left it to the human heart within them to say whether they could still go on believing that goodness was not really goodness unless it was done by a Jew; that a cup of cold water did not taste sweetly on parched lips unless the cup was handed by a Jew, and the parched lips the lips of a Jew. He left it to themselves to say whether it was like One Whom men might call God, to notice these petty racial distinctions and to force Himself to act in a way that offends a good man's moral sense rather than hurt the feelings of a Jew. And why should it hurt the feelings of a Jew to be asked to believe that God loves us all, and wants us all to know it? If any man has religious feelings which are hurt by the happiness of others, would he not do well to pray God to deliver him from such feelings?

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So, in the early days, in the days of the Galilean ministry, out among the hills, Jesus spoke, going about doing good. And the leaders in Church and State listened. At the very first, it would appear that our Lord had a kind of hope that they might be moved to break up the crust into which their faith had hardened, and that they would have pity upon the whole world, for the same reason as God asked Jonah to have pity on Nineveh—in sheer compassion.

And we know that one here and one there was touched and moved. We may well believe, too, that many were ready to declare themselves as on the more human side. Indeed, it may very well be that the leaders became aware of a movement which, if it once got under way, might go all lengths, and that it was because of this secret knowledge of theirs, that one day, and that suddenly—for so the narrative bears us out—they decided that this subtle danger of a movement towards tenderness, towards humanity, towards the sweeping away of nationalist barriers, should cease, and that this Jesus, who was threatening the fabric of their long-cherished dreams, should be hurried away into silence.

They therefore crucified Him; not knowing, what our Lord knew perfectly, that truth crucified cannot be holden of death. but lives, dies, goes to work in the world.

LECTURE IV

"And the Veil of the Temple Was Rent in Twain From the Top to the Bottom"

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"And the Veil of the Temple Was Rent in Twain From the Top to the Bottom"

WHEN a new truth dawns upon the world there begins there and then a period of ferment and struggle. As with ourselves in these northern latitudes, it is only after a time of twilight, in which the darkness of the night is assailed and penetrated and overcome, that the sun at length stands out obviously in the sky. Precisely so, a new truth, when it dawns upon the heart of a man or when it dawns upon the habitual life of a nation, has for a time to stand at the door, so to speak, because the place into which it would enter is already occupied.

The human heart or the life of a nation can never be described as a white sheet ready to receive any new writing. The human heart and the heart of a people is already fully occupied, and there must be a period when the earlier inhabitants contest bitterly the ground of which they suspect a new truth threatens to dispossess them.

It is this that casts light upon the fact (for we see that it is inevitable), that those who announce a really new truth to an age must lay their account with suffering. Suffering is the test which we apply to anyone who proposes that at his bidding we shall change our ways. And it is only by suffering for the truth which one announces that the truth itself is at length admitted and enters into the historical human forces.

All these things have their illustration in the story of Christ's historical appearance in this world. If one could steep oneself in the literature which describes the origin of the Christian movement in the world, acquainting oneself with the popular expectations of that time, with the various political watchwords and ambitions, and could then stand back from it all and ponder the whole situation, the general image of what took place would have something like the following aspect.

We see Jesus, a Jew according to the flesh, having in His soul the loftiest inspirations of His race. We hear in Him the perfect note which we heard with various qualifications in Job and the Psalms, in Isaiah, in Amos, and in Jonah. For, as a New Testament writer puts it, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of

all prophecy." Far from it being true that our Lord's mind was at the outset merely mystical and remote from human concerns, it is much nearer the truth to hold that His was the ablest and sanest mind alive in the world at that moment, the most far-seeing, the most statesmanlike, possessed by an idealism which this poor world has so far hardly begun to overtake. We were wrong to allow ourselves to think of the mind of Jesus as more or less vacant and indifferent to the actual world which was about Him. It is not mere innocence, it is a sound and practical insight which enables Him to move as He does through the pages of the New Testament, beset as He was by all kinds of low minds and political conspirators, trying to entangle Him or to win Him over to their party, and, failing there, to destroy Him before His time.

He begins, as we saw, by associating Himself definitely with John the Baptist. He goes beyond John the Baptist in His depth of insight and what we call to-day His metaphysic —His doctrine of God; but ethically He begins at the side of the Baptist. The Kingdom of God is at hand: that is *His* message also. But the Kingdom of God in the mind of Jesus

is something larger and deeper than in the mind of the Baptist.

In the mind of Jesus, the world at the moment was offering an opportunity inconceivably great for the beginning of a new world-order. In the early days of His ministry our Lord, it would appear, became a preacher and exponent of the loving intentions of God to this whole distracted world; that God loved the whole world, and that if He loved a separate nation in what might seem a partial way it was only because that separate nation seemed to God to be likely to become a better instrument for His world-purposes; that God's end all the time and all through history had been the whole world of mankind; all else had simply been ways and means.

For a time Jesus went about in Galilee on the outer edge of the ecclesiastical world of His day, amongst those who were in contact with the spirit of Greece. He accompanied His words with loving deeds, healing the sick and doing good. These were probably His happiest days. The leaders of the various parties and the representatives of various prejudices had either not yet heard of Him, or saw no reason, so far, to intervene. But a day came when they made up their minds that

things had gone far enough; whereupon they sent representatives to observe Jesus, to listen to what He was saying, and to find out, I suppose, whether they could make use of Jesus, and what use. It was at this stage, we must believe, that they became aware of something in the message of Jesus with which they saw they could never come to terms. If the things that Jesus was saying were true, and were to be popularly accepted and acted upon,—if, as looked likely to happen, the whole world was beginning to go after this new Teacher, it would mean that their schemes would be wrecked, and they would be left a political machine without human and passionate support.

To any serious student of the life of Jesus, there is a quite obvious time when there seems to gather about His voice a cloud of care; a certain hardness begins to manifest itself in His utterances, a certain new resoluteness, such as we detect in one who knows that henceforward he has enemies. What is it that has dawned upon Him? It is here that the story of the Temptation becomes our chief authority, and in the light of all that we have said, we are now in a position to deal with that story.

Our Lord's first and last passion was to preach the good news of the love of God *to the whole world of mankind.* His method was first to get His own people to accept that gospel. There He failed. At a very early stage He perceived that there—that is to say, with His own people—He was going to fail. It was this forecast of failure which produced the stage on which the drama of the Temptation was enacted. The Temptation is described in the Gospels as having had three particular thrusts. Throughout, however, it is one temptation, and that, this: "Cease from your function as an interpreter and channel of eternal things. Become a mere religious figure, a kind of magical worker, a healer. Do strange things. Thus you will gain a following and make a stir in the world"; a temptation which Jesus repelled from the very outskirts of His soul. "Very well then"—here is the next wave of suggestion—"if you are impervious to that lower appeal there remain only two other alternatives. You must frankly cut yourself off from the hard and exclusive thing into which the religion of your fathers is hardening, and go out into the wide world to find a hearing. That is one alternative. The

other is, go over to one or other of the political parties of your time."

Now, there were three such parties. I can only name them and indicate most briefly their various points of view.

There was the party of the Sadducees, a party which had become quite frankly political. Their whole policy was to embarrass Rome, which, of course, we must always remember, was at the time the suzerain power. This party was in league with all who were disaffected towards Rome. They were in sympathy with those robber-bands (of one of which, doubtless, Barabbas was a leader) whose whole business and occupation was to embarrass the Roman power, to make life uncomfortable and dangerous, and thus to keep the public mind raw and unhappy and ready at any moment for violent courses. They were, as we should call them to-day, the diehards.

The second party, the party of the Pharisees, was from every point of view a much more respectable one. They were religious men. Indeed, we can have in our minds a pretty fair idea of the whole sect of the Pharisees if we remember what Saul of Tarsus was —Saul who became Paul. Saul of Tarsus

was, before his conversion, a typical Pharisee. As he himself said, "a Pharisee of the Pharisees." He was a man who honestly believed in the religion of his fathers, and who held that the one thing that he and every other devout Jew was called upon to do was to defend with infinite scruple the purity of the Ceremonial Law, and abide God's time when He would vindicate His faithful people. The Pharisees were the extreme High Church Party of the time, with that devoutness which has often been the characteristic of people who hold a very exclusive belief—a party which will always exert an influence in a society which is without principle and frivolous—this not because it is right, but because it is severe.

The third party is the party known in the New Testament as the party of Herod. This in many ways was a mediating party between pure Judaism and the Roman Empire. It was a compromise which the Romans with their great political sagacity had come to. So long as Herod could keep the Jews tolerably quiet, Rome had no objection to conceding to Herod something of the circumstances of a small king. His orders from Rome were precisely to that effect. It was his business to hold the balance even between the contending

parties, and at the same time to permit the general filtration of outside ideas into the life of his kingdom. Later on the Romans found that this system did not work. Herod became ambitious. He had dreams of putting himself at the head of the Jewish race, and contesting the supremacy of Rome. For we must not forget that at that moment, next to the power of Imperial Rome, the greatest power in the world, judged by numbers and by intellectual vitality, was that of the Jewish people. So long as the Jewish people remained disorganised, split up into hostile parties full of recriminations, Rome could afford to look on. But the moment there was a danger, as later there appeared to be a danger, that this little king whom they were supporting might make an effort to raise the racial standard, they intervened and let loose those terrible events which in the year 70 of our era scattered the very foundations of the Jewish polity.

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These, then, were the programmes which we must believe floated in the nature of temptations before the mind of our Lord. We know how He decided, or rather perhaps we do not know until we reflect; but He decided simply

to go on and on as He had begun in Galilee, on a mission which He now foresaw would be an increasingly lonely one, of declaring and revealing to all who would hear and would believe, the goodness and the love of God to the whole race of man.

But it is only when we reflect, and when we look back from the Cross to that earlier crisis represented by the Temptation, that we see what was involved in the attitude which our Lord chose; and it is also only by looking back from the Cross that we see what our Lord clearly foresaw.

Our Lord perceived quite clearly that things were moving to a crisis between the Jewish nation and the great power of Rome. Judaism was steadily hardening down into an anti-Roman league, into a veiled conspiracy. If that were not changed, if a new temper and policy were not introduced, things, our Lord perceived, could have only one end—the Roman power would be compelled for the sake of its own security to break up and scatter the nationalism of the Jews, and to suppress with violence every external circumstance of the Jewish religion. This course the Romans would take only under compulsion; for the Roman Empire of the time of our Lord, all

things considered, was a model of fairness and of justice towards the religions amongst its conquered peoples. The Roman Empire had a great sense of world-mission. (Indeed, it was from their deep reading in Roman history that German scholars and publicists learned all that they used to say about the call to an imperial race to impose its Kultur upon the world. Mommsen did much to bias German views of world-empire.) But Rome was as fair—there is no higher compliment—as the British Empire is fair to the divergent religions of India.

But what Rome could not, of course, endure, was to look on whilst a race like the Jews, prolific, cohesive, passionate, should become more and more obsessed with the idea that their function in the world was to be separate from other peoples, superior to them, contemptuous of them, cultivating within themselves ideas and an education which worked out practically as a passionate hatred of Rome.

Now our Lord yearned, as later on S. Paul yearned, to save His own people, and not only to save them in the sense which we mean today when we speak of a man being saved—saved, that is to say, by the entrance into his life of some holy power—but "saved" in the

most crude sense, "saved" in a political sense, "saved" from inevitable destruction at the hands of Rome. Let Judaism break up the hard crust that had settled down upon her spirit; let the River of God which flowed through the Holy City pour out upon all peoples; let His people abandon the petty ambition to be a nation, and let them assume the much greater career of being a voice, a spirit, a conscience to the whole human race; let them declare what every prophet declared, that "there is no respect of persons with God," that God has no favourites, that anything He ever said to His own people He said to them that they might say it to all other peoples, that He chose them because at the time they were able to hear and to understand, but that He said what He said to them as the surest way of getting what He said into the ears and minds of all mankind.

And so our Lord went on; in the grave language of Scripture, which only when we have these things in our view we are able to understand, "He set His face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem." "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." He knew that if He persisted in declaring and developing His message, a message which cut at the very

roots of their dearest political and nationalistic ambitions, He would provoke a storm which would roll over Him and destroy Him. But He knew that the destroying of Him would be the letting loose upon at least a sensitive minority of His own people the great truth and revelation for which He had been willing to die. He knew that one here and one there—witness this kind of teaching in the Parables of the Sower and of the Drag-net and of the Mustard Seed—would be constrained by what they saw in Him, and heard in Him, and by His fate, to reflect, to revise their own prejudices, to re-open their own scriptures, to ponder under this new and startling light the promises of God which were of old, and to see the truth as it dawned upon the two disciples upon the way to Emmaus, and as it broke like a lightning flash upon Saul of Tarsus outside the gates of Damascus; that here and there the rumour of this profound and illuminating perception would spread—that through all history God had had in store for His own people no mere future of power as though God's people were no better than heathen; that the great approaching gift of God through all the ages had been of a Sufferer; and that in the sufferings which He,

Jesus, had borne with meekness, all God's promises had been fulfilled.

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The other great consequence, whether our Lord foresaw it, and I think there is evidence that He did foresee it, was that His dying as a Jew at the hands of Jews and for the sake of a revelation of God which was Jewish to the very core, would put, if not His nation, at least the religion of His fathers, right with the outside world, would correct their views, which were just enough, it may have been, with regard to existing Judaism as a state, but which were unjust with regard to the Jewish people as the appointed ambassadors of the all-embracing love of God. Our Lord perceived, and He died with this great faith supporting His soul, that if He died, a Jew at the hands of Jews, for the sake of something fundamentally Jewish in religion, He would rend the Veil of the Temple in twain; that He would let the world see right into the heart of the central mystery which from the beginning and through all the ages God had been communicating to His people. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth," He said on the eve of His dying, "will draw all men unto Me."

It was about the same time that one of the

disciples came to Jesus and said, "Master, there are some Greeks here who say that they would see Jesus." Whereupon, we read, something passed over our Lord's mind, a kind of dream or vision, a far-away look into things; and when He opened His mouth this was what He said: "Father, the hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit."

All this happened, and has happened, and remains the central fact in the religious consciousness of the world to-day. It is not without intention that the narrative of the death of our Lord takes care to tell us that it was a Roman centurion who, seeing Christ die, and knowing, doubtless, some of the circumstances, said: "Truly this man was the Son of God."

LECTURE V

"And He Led Him Up and Shewed Him All the Kingdoms of the World in a Moment of Time"

LECTURE V

"And He Led Him Up and Shewed Him All the Kingdoms of the World in a Moment of Time"

THERE is a question with which I should like at this point to deal: it is this. Why did not Jesus go direct to the Gentile world and declare to them the message of the impartial love of God, for the announcement of which He was rejected by His own people? We know that our Lord had a great welcome from the Galileans. As we read the gospel story we can feel in our own minds the difference between the atmosphere in Galilee and the atmosphere which He enters as He draws near to Jerusalem. It is openly stated also that our Lord was well aware that in leaving Galilee and setting His face to go to Jerusalem, He was leaving behind Him what were likely to have been His happiest days. And so the narrative which deals with that part of His life affects us as though we were reading of some one who, having passed some happy days amongst friends, amongst people who had man-

ners and a language which had liberated all that was best in himself, suddenly realises that the time is up and that he must return to some dreary and formidable way of life. In the Gospels we are made to feel that our Lord enjoyed in Galilee a certain ease of mind, that He had the happy use of all His faculties, that He was immediately and obviously of value. We are made to realise the difference between the attitude to Him of Gentiles, of Roman soldiers, for example, and the attitude of the Jewish leaders. We remember how deeply touched He was by the behaviour of a Roman centurion—so urbane and cordial, so desirable in contrast with the sourness and suspicion of men of His own race: how He looked round and said, "I have not found such faith, no, not in Israel." Further, we have seen that the idea had at least crossed our Lord's mind that it might be God's will for Him that, having given His own people a fair chance and warning, He should on their deliberate refusal leave them and sail for the open seas. Indeed, this idea and our Lord's struggle with it, form the very crisis of the Temptation in the Wilderness. We gather also from things here and there in the further story, things in themselves incidental but for that very reason authoritative,

that although the "temptation" to go direct to the Gentile world was definitely and in spirit finally rejected in the travail in the wilderness, it was a temptation which left Him there and then, only for a season. And, to say no more, we recall that incident—so mysterious until perceived from this very point of view—when Philip and Andrew came to Jesus and told Him that there were some Greeks at hand who desired to see Him; whereupon, at least so it seems to me, some old vision, some old dream, some flash and memory of a buried purpose, swept across the soul of Jesus, making Him for the moment silent, "troubling Him." And when He did speak, the words He uttered only reveal beyond all questioning that it had been at one time a dream which it might be He always perceived He must not indulge, to escape the bitter climate of His own race and creed and throw Himself upon the human love of common men, speaking to the general pathos. For when He opened His lips it was to say: "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name."

And the question is, "Why did not Jesus, having given the chief priests and rulers re-

peated and patient opportunity to do justice to His appeal, turn from them and go directly to the Gentiles?"

In raising any question as to why our Lord chose one way and not another, we are never for one moment to be understood as suggesting that the choice of action which He made could in all the circumstances have been other than it was. In asking the question we are only hoping to make more vital to ourselves as much of our Lord's personal experience as has been revealed to us. We wish also to put away from our minds once for all the idea that Jesus, our Lord, found it always an easy thing to take the way through life which as a matter of history He did take. We wish to bring home to ourselves that life for Him also had its perplexities, its cross-currents, its alternatives, and that He dealt with those perplexities and cross-currents and alternatives in the light of what seemed to Him God's will, in the light of what seemed to Him at every step not easiest but best.

On all this there are two things which at least one may say, in addition to such light upon the matter as we have already found in earlier studies. For one thing, on the evidence of the story of the Temptation, we may say

that our Lord perceived that were He to go direct to the Gentiles, sooner or later He would be confronted with the same problem as He had evaded in Jerusalem. The Gentile world also would listen to Him so long as it pleased them or flattered them or comforted them to listen to Him. They would love to hear Him say that the Gentiles were as dear to the heart of God as Jews. They would greatly enjoy anything He might say in disparagement of Jews. But the moment He proceeded to make demands of them, they also would be likely to resist. Having taken from the message of Jesus what suited themselves, they would make that a reason for rejecting or taking no interest in the rest of His message—though the rest of the message was the real message. For it was not the real message of Jesus that, in the eyes of God, Jew and Gentile were alike. In the eyes of God, Jew and Gentile in certain fundamental things were not alike. They were alike in this, that God loved them both, for He loves us all. But they were not alike; for, in the view of Jesus, the Jew had a knowledge of God and a conscience towards God of which the Gentile had only a dim and unsteady reflection. In short, had our Lord gone directly to the Gentiles, they would have been apt to turn

against Him at the very point when the kind of influence which He came to let loose upon the world was beginning to assail their natural disposition. And so, although this would have happened only later and after a season of much natural happiness and good feeling, things would have moved on to a crisis in which once again He would have been faced with precisely the same alternatives as were confronting Him in Jerusalem—He would either have had to fall in with their prejudices and inclinations, making Himself their leader, advocating their point of view, or—He would have had to withstand those prejudices and inclinations of theirs in the name, it might well be, of the *Holiness* of God. On Calvary our Lord laid down His life to vindicate the love of God. On some Gentile hill He would have been compelled to lay down His life to vindicate the very idea of God as personal and holy.

Or, still more likely, having gratified themselves by listening to a form of teaching which seemed to them to humble the pretensions of the Jews, the Gentiles, when Jesus proceeded to summon them in turn to rise to His great argument and to acquit themselves as the children of God, might have simply melted away from before Him, leaving Him alone with a

group of outcasts. And certainly there are signs that Jesus foresaw that in the long run He would be left with the outcasts; that, as in the beginning, so once again, God would make man out of the dust! But there were outcasts in Jerusalem and round about.

There is another consideration. Let us assume, as we must, that human nature has always been much the same. It is certain, then, that had our Lord decided to go directly to the Gentiles, and had things gone with Him there as we have supposed—the people beginning to drop away from Him as soon as they felt He was proposing to make changes in their habits of life, in fact, to introduce a disturbing conscience—those Gentiles would have made it a charge against Jesus, and a reason for their not taking themselves or Him seriously, that He had been rejected and flung aside by His own people.

We have the saying that "great minds think alike," and in one of Plato's dialogues there is a deep discussion of this very question which in its ultimate principles may at one stage in His ministry have occupied our Lord's mind. A friend is suggesting to Socrates that he should go away from Athens, from Athens where the authorities have decided to silence

him, and if he persists in his teaching, to crush him. Why not slip away, the friend suggests, to some other city of Greece, or to some island? There he would be sure of a welcome, and in any case he would be free of the network of hostilities which if he remained in Athens could lead to only one result. Socrates listens and replies. It is obvious that already the matter is settled in his own mind: he will not leave Athens. Whether he shall be put to death in Athens, it is for Athens to say. For himself he can only say what has been given him to say, and say it to his countrymen. But he proceeds, and this not with the view of confirming in his own mind his decision, but rather with the view of comforting his friends beforehand, so that, if he dies and when he dies, they shall not be made more miserable by thinking that he, Socrates, might have acted differently. And this, in effect, is what he says: "But now, suppose I were to do as you advise me. Suppose I were to slip away, and were to come to some other city of Greece, to Thebes or Megara, for example, or to one of the Greek islands. Would not the people in that city or in that island wonder to see a man who claimed to be not a criminal, who claimed indeed to be a good citizen and to be devoting himself to the wel-

fare of his land, nevertheless forsaking his own city? Would they not ask why such a man had left his own city? And, if he defended himself, saying that his city had become a corrupt place, would they not answer that in that case there was all the greater need for him to stay and help to make it a good place? But, if he went on to say that the men of his own city were proposing to punish him and even to put him to death, even then the citizens of that land to which he had gone for refuge would have the right to answer: 'Even so: still, why should a man fly away from his own city simply because it is proposing, in the exercise of its prerogative, and in harmony with its laws, to punish him? Does he not owe everything to the city in which he was born, and in which he has lived so long? Did his city not defend his life, shelter him as an infant, educate him at its schools, and lead on his mind by the influence of its public buildings and its manners and its human fellowships? Why then should a man, the moment his city is displeased with him, run away, forgetting all he owes? Nay: but we do not want such a man in our midst! We do not wish to have amongst us even as a guest such an example of disloyalty to the State. Our sympathies are with Athens, which having

borne and tended and educated such a man is now treated so basely by him.'"

I say, "great minds think alike"; and reflections of this kind may have passed in waves of light and shade over the soul of Jesus. And even if it be objected that the Greek world of our Lord's day had forgotten or had never known its Plato, that does not touch His case. A soul of the rank of Jesus or a soul approaching to that rank, if it ever debates with itself and comes to a decision, debates with itself and comes to a decision by processes which will always commend themselves not to the ignorant or to the worldly-minded, but to the elect spirits of the race, to the spirits nearest to itself in moral dignity.

The fact certainly is, our Lord rejected the suggestion that He might deliver His message to the Gentiles, turning His back in anger and sorrow upon His own race.

One might construct an illustration from ingredients likely enough and recognisable in the catch-words and rumours of our own time. For example: The suggestion is made frequently in our day that the organised Church should definitely make a break with the entire social system which it has accompanied down through the ages, a social system which the

Church itself has helped to create. The suggestion is frequently made that the Church should put itself at the head, or become the pledged advocate, of the masses who are outside, and who, it is often explained, remain outside because the Church seems to sanction a system which to them has become wholly odious. The Church is appealed to, sometimes on grounds of loyalty to certain words and principles of Jesus, to abandon a position which is at least ambiguous. Sometimes, on the lips of those who are less friendly, the Church is *advised* to begin to make friends with the masses outside, so that on a day which is declared to be coming when everything shall be shaken, the Church may not be homeless. The argument is embittered and made more cogent when it is pointed out to us who hold office in the Church and may be supposed to be concerned in its future, that our chosen constituency has already forsaken us. And *that* I admit at times seems true; and if true it is disquieting, not for the Church but for those who make light of the Church.

And many a good man both in the pulpit and in the pew has grown tired of things as they are, and has broken loose from an institu-

tion which seemed to him to have lost its connection with the vital forces of society.

Well now, supposing—as many suggest and as is declared to be the forthcoming policy of that section of the Christian Church which has the largest numbers and has certainly the greatest political sagacity—supposing there is a movement on the part of all the more vital men in office in the Church to separate themselves from the social system in which and for which they hitherto have laboured; supposing the Church, through its officials and more representative men and women, were to go over to the masses and become the point and spearhead of all the unrest and protest with which life in our day swells and breaks out—would that, to begin with, be a heroic course, and in the long run would it even so much as succeed? It might lead, it would inevitably lead, to the overthrow of society; but what then? Any mischievous child can overthrow a long-standing thing. How would such a course increase within the souls of men the sense of God and establish in the world the kingdom of unselfish love?

If we were welcomed by the world it would only be because we had done something which pleased the world; it would be because we had

begun to say what they had all along been saying. We might roll up and lower the flag of the Cross, or remove the ancient symbol and writing. We might substitute certain other great words, but words neither so great nor good, as the old words of the Christian faith. We might emblazon on our banners "liberty, fraternity, equality," and inaugurate a revolution. But such a programme by itself would never satisfy the Church of Christ. All that would have happened so far would be that one class of people had now their way, and another class of people had been baited and discomfited. Nothing so far would have happened out of love to God, or out of love to man. The Church having fled from one task would now be confronted with another. And from the beginning the Church of that new time would be embarrassed. For the moment we began to deal closely and in the name of Christ with our new constituency, we should encounter precisely the opposition and the hardness of heart before which we had formerly grown tired and angry and desperate. For a day would come —unless we had abandoned Christ for the sake of some lower and merely secular policy—when we should be compelled, if we were resolved to live honourably with Christ and with our own

higher spirit, to stand in front of our new constituency and in effect to say: "Together we have attained to certain things—more liberty, more leisure, more equality, more control. Well now, what do you propose to do with these? To what unselfish tasks are you now going to consecrate these new faculties and opportunities? Or are you now proposing simply to occupy territory from which you have cast out others? In that case, so far as God is concerned, things are as they were. Nay, they are worse than they were, for we have had all the horror and the pain and the bitterness, and the legacy of hatred, and the loss of time, and the disappointment of all the best people in the world." Something of that kind, I say, is what would happen were we to evade a prospect which looks forbidding, and, it may well be, is going to be as hard as it looks, and were we to come to terms with movements whose final intentions have not yet revealed themselves, even though at first sight they seem to promise a certain measure of relief. The fact is, we can anticipate what would happen in our own day, and it is precisely what did happen in the days of the New Testament Church. For it is what will always happen when men are appealed to or are commanded in any higher name than

their own prejudices and inclinations and passions and ambitions. The representatives of Christ in any such issue will have to choose between facing the hard prospect that confronts them—that on the one hand, and on the other, accommodating themselves to and making terms with some promising fashion of thought which happens to be abroad at the time.

Take an illustration from what actually happened.

There was a day when S. Paul stood on Mars' Hill in Athens. I cannot rid myself of the feeling that the occasion had made the Apostle a little nervous and self-conscious. We should not wonder. It was Athens. To stand on Mars' Hill must have been a thrilling experience for a man with S. Paul's historical sense. He began his address. It reads like a Gifford Lecture on "Comparative Religion." In effect the Apostle tells those Athenians that they and he, their race and his, and indeed all mankind, are brothers. A sentiment which Greeks of that later day were ready enough to subscribe to, with their own reservations. Then the Apostle quoted one of their poets. It was a colourless quotation, not amounting to much. S. Paul himself could have said many a much better thing. Still, it helped things

along and kept the Athenians in good humour. But a thoroughly Christian man like S. Paul cannot go on for more than a time, saying nothing. He is bound to move on to what is his business as a Christian preacher. And his business as a Christian preacher is to get away behind that level of things on which we are Jews, or Greeks, or barbarians, or rich people or poor people, or (to introduce our own phraseology) capitalists or working men. His business is to get to that level where we are men—good men or bad men or not so good as we might be; where we are cold or kind, friendly or malicious, generous or greedy, transparent or hidden. Paul, therefore, somewhat suddenly, as though he were ashamed of his dalliance, moved on to his proper ground. Whereupon a thing happened which is as old as man. The moment the Apostle said something that really signified, his audience began to slip away. When he spoke of a throne and bar of final judgment, before which it was the doom of every man, Jew and Greek, bond and free, master and servant alike, to be haled by God; from the moment, that is to say, when he touched them with blame and fear and justice—from the moment when he unveiled the face of something—a will of God which is

there, no matter what may be our mood, from that moment, they slipped away. "We will hear thee again," they said, meaning, "we will not hear thee any further just now." It was, so far as we know, S. Paul's one mistake of the kind.

From Athens he wrote a letter to Corinth—it may have been that very night and after he had had time to think over the experiences of the day. "When I come amongst you," he wrote, "I propose to know nothing"—no more harmless quotations from the poets, I suspect —"but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Surely it is only to paraphrase his words to say, "I resolve to deal henceforth with men, not with the view of pleasing them, or confirming them in their own wisdom, but with the view of convincing them that before God the human soul over all the world is one—one in its failure, and in its necessity, and in its hope."

LECTURE VI

"And All the People That Came Together to That Sight, Beholding the Things Which Were Done, Smote Their Breasts, and Returned"

LECTURE VI

"And All the People That Came Together to That Sight, Beholding the Things Which Were Done, Smote Their Breasts, and Returned"

JESUS was put to death at the instigation of the leaders of His day in Church and State. To those leaders, when at length the drift of Christ's teaching became apparent to them, there were only two courses open—they must either listen to Christ, or they must silence Him. They did not hesitate for a moment between those two courses: they proceeded to silence Him.

If the whole business were not so overwhelmingly sad and emotionally so poignant, we could take real pleasure in observing our Lord's repeated triumphs over the petty designs of His enemies.

Even on the lower level of adroitness, our Lord is their easy master.

Of course, He had the enormous advantage which a good man always has in any debate: He was not fighting for His own Hand: He

was concerned only for what was most true and most good.

They tried to entangle Him by His own speech, proposing to Him extreme, and, as they thought, self-contradictory examples of the working out of His declared principles. But our Lord amazed and discomfited them by defending even the most extreme cases in the name of some deep human principle which He asked them in turn to repudiate if they dared.

They would have liked, those leaders in Church and State, to have managed the case of Jesus without any assistance from the Roman power. It was their pose to go on as though the Roman power had no jurisdiction in their midst. And so their first plan was to convict Jesus publicly of some word or action which would have warranted them in having Him stoned to death: a process which Rome permitted when the proper conditions were present. But in order to have a victim stoned, it was necessary to have people to cast the stones. It was necessary, that is to say, to have a case wrought up such as would inflame public opinion. It was there that the chief priests and rulers so far had failed. We read that they feared the people.

If Jesus had remained in Galilee, in the

country, away from the centre of things, they might have pretended not to be aware of Him. But a day came when a certain action which our Lord took forced their hand. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt, thereby assuming to Himself publicly the accepted insignia of the Messiah. Whereupon we become aware of a new haste and something like panic on the part of the rulers and chief priests. At any moment there might be a mass-movement in support of Jesus, in which their nationalist ideals might be abandoned, and men might get a glimpse of something very different from what *they* had in view, something more like what Isaiah had dreamed of, and Jeremiah and "Jonah."

It is here where, if the whole matter were not for us Christians so purely grave and holy, we should have a real intellectual pleasure in observing our Lord's easy discomfiture of His enemies. For, as we said in our first study, our Lord is never for one moment the victim of those who seem ultimately to have their way. He is always, and at every stage, their master and His own. And even at the last it is not their own way which they win: it is the way which He, Jesus, designed that things should take if the Jewish leaders were determined to

crush Him. For what was it that as a matter of fact happened? The Jewish rulers would have liked to brush aside the entire incident by the use of their own powers without calling in and thereby recognising the right of the Roman authority. This they could have done by bringing against Jesus a purely religious charge such as would have aroused the people against Him. There they failed.

In their distress they seem to have gone further in a certain direction than they had intended. Their attempt to treat the whole matter with disdain would no longer serve, and it was they who first directly suggested that our Lord was claiming to be, and was acting the part and programme of, the Messiah. They asked Him whether it were not so. And in His reply He did not deny it. But it was they who, by their very pronouncing of the word Messiah, were made to confess that there were features in the entire bearing and appearance of Jesus which suggested that explanation of Him.

If this claim by Jesus to be the Messiah, or this acceptance by Him of their suggestion that He made such a claim, had been sufficient to arouse the people against Him, all would have gone well from the rulers' point of view.

But the people were not aroused. On the contrary, they seem rather to have become watchful over the progress of the issue. They were in no mood to see another put down, as the Baptist had been put down, Who at any rate seemed to know His way and to have something vital and actual and urgent to say to his fellows, and especially to those in authority.

The chief priests and rulers had therefore to take another line—and it must have been a humiliating thing to them to do. They had to call in the secular power, the hated foreign power of Rome. And not content with merely recognising Rome *proforma,* they had to pretend, as it must have seemed to the best men amongst themselves at the moment, to be most jealous for the undisputed sovereignty of this alien power which, nevertheless, they plotted and dreamed and prayed might one day be overthrown. They were compelled to bring as a charge against this man of their own race that "He made Himself a King," adding words which must have burned their tongues to utter, "We have no king but Caesar."

That is to say, to say no more on this point at the moment, by the sheer goodness and simplicity of our Lord, those rulers were compelled to betray themselves, to expose the last

secret of their own hearts, namely this, that even their political frenzy against Rome was not at all a thing of principle, but merely another of their hard class-traditions, and one which they were ready to abandon if by abandoning it they were enabled to secure some more immediate relief.

And so Rome, in the person of Pilate, was brought in. Rome did not come in—Rome was invited, and invited by those nationalist leaders whose entire platform it was to protest that they could do very well without Rome, and indeed would never be their own wonderful selves until Rome was driven from their sacred soil.

The rest of the story is simply squalid, the one tolerable circumstance being that, as the background made up of those cynical politicians becomes darker and more hateful, the figure of our Lord becomes all the time to our view more calm, whiter, the manifest judgment of God upon them all.

Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod—all friends for the day—from the one to the other Jesus was passed, Himself for the most part maintaining silence. Face to face with that silence, the secrets of their hearts could not but appear. Where all are bad, Pilate, perhaps, in all the

circumstances, is the one who at least shows some traces of human feeling. But in his case also they are only idle traces such as a tiny runnel of water makes in the sand, only to be obliterated when the whole sea swings forward. The moment it came home to Pilate that he might get into trouble by indulging his own better feelings, he also announced himself a mere creature of time and the occasion, committing Jesus to the Roman soldiers to be put to death.

And so the Cross was erected, not a high scaffolding as I used to think, on which, because it was lifted up to the sky, death could not but assume a certain dignity. No: it was a mean contrivance not rising much above the height of a man; so that one dying on the Cross was still surrounded by the faces of those who were dealing out death to him. There and thus Jesus was crucified: wherefore we call Him Lord and God! As the Creed puts it, with the purpose, as I take it, of shaking our minds free of any spurious sentimentality—"He was crucified, dead, and buried."

* * * * *

And now, let us stand back for a moment from all that, and let us ask ourselves a question.

Is it not the case that our deepest feeling, when we have confronted ourselves with the natural physical fact of Christ's death, is that *that* is not the end of it? Is there not something within us which says, and keeps saying, that *that* is not the end of it? If that were the end of it, or if that had been the end of it, it would mean that this life of ours is at the last, and in fact, a rotten thing, manipulated and controlled by the Pilates and the Caiaphases and the Herods, in which a good man is nothing but a God's fool. But that was not the end of it. The doing to death of Jesus has become the classical proof in history of the utter failure of a bad deed.

Anatole France has a story which he leaves to those who read it to make of it what they will. It occurs in a volume called *Mother-of-Pearl;* and the idea, I think, is that just as when one looks at a piece of mother-of-pearl, lights and shadows come and go—what one moment looked bright, next moment, or looked at from a slightly different angle, being overshadowed—so in this group of stories things mean at one time, and according to our mood, one thing; at another time, and when we are in another mood, something other. One story in this group is a story—altogether imaginary—

of a Roman Procurator. The Roman Procurator is Pontius Pilate. Years have elapsed since the day of Christ's death. Pilate has been recalled to Rome, as indeed in fact he was; so that with all his planning he failed. It is well to remember that. We perhaps make too much of what seems true enough, that unscrupulous people get on in this world. But perhaps, if we knew everything, unscrupulous people do not get on so often or so thoroughly as we suppose. And sometimes they do not get on at all. But to return. Pontius Pilate has come back to Italy and is now spending his last days in Baiae at the baths. One day as he is being wheeled about on his chair, a stranger approaches him. They had met long years before, and in Jerusalem. They arrange to see each other soon. Next day they meet and have a long and intimate talk. The stranger at length, and quite casually, refers to some political or social trouble which at the time of his visit to Jerusalem had been occupying Pilate. It had to do with one Jesus, who claimed to be a king or something to that effect, whom Pilate had, reluctantly as the stranger remembered, condemned to death. Did Pilate recall the incident? And what happened afterwards? To which Pilate, ponder-

ing for a moment as though putting pressure upon his recollection, replied, "I remember nothing about it!"

Of course, that is only a story. But it is intended to suggest the possibility that what the world has decided to regard as its supreme crisis was something of such common dimensions to those who took part in it, that some years later the chief actor in the drama had forgotten all about it. If that is what Anatole France means, we do not thank him for the story. We do not thank anyone who suggests to us that a great death is not a memorable thing. But even if Pilate forgot all about the death of Jesus, in the pressure of his daily interests, the human race has not forgotten it. If Pilate did forget or could forget it, it only means that Pilate was not a normal man, and that it is not through the Pilates of this world, but through its perceiving and sensitive souls —through its Marys and its Johns, who also were there—that it has pleased God to carry things forward bequeathing a conscience to the human race.

No: this distaste of ours of such a story, embodying as it does the insinuation that levity is the ultimate thing in man, is the very rock, as

we see when we ponder things deeply, on which God has risked building the spiritual world.

It is the common human heart that makes us philosophers and theologians. It is the moral necessities arising from our own nature and from our position in this world which make us cry to God for some fact on which our sinking soul may touch bottom and begin to rise.

Standing there at the Cross, and looking on, until the whole sad business is done, we know by all that is right and sound and uncorrupted within us that what we see is not the end, and cannot be the end. We feel that there is a next move impending from the side of God. Were what we see the end, it would mean that life had failed, that God had failed. It would mean that the power which has brought even us into being had given us a moral sensitiveness greater than His own, were He to keep silence forever. No: as we stand there, the Cross of Christ in its own context drives home to our hearts two things. First, that there *is,* for in Christ there *was,* an indomitable thing which gives itself away without reserve, in the persistent belief that it is worth while, and that nothing else is worth while—a thing which we now call Love, or God as we must now conceive God.

And the second thing which the Cross of Christ drives home to us is this: that we live in such a world, and our own unredeemed hearts are such, that the like of this could happen—something so cruel, so hard, so unrelieved that the very sun hid its face in a cloud from the sight of it.

To say the same thing once again: the Cross declares, first, that God is, and that He is such an One.

And this also the Cross declares: that there is something in the world and within our own breasts which opposes itself to God until that something has been changed.

* * * * *

It was the sorrow which the Cross brought to loving hearts that in the beginning prepared those hearts for the Great Faith that He Who had died was not dead. It was the sorrow caused by the Cross which made a blank in the hearts of those who for three years had been with Jesus, a blank of the very shape of Christ, a blank which only the returning Christ could fill.

And to us who believe in God, who are persuaded that we dwell in a world which has something large and fine in hand, and not in a world which is engaged, as smaller minds sug-

gest, upon a cruel trick repeated tirelessly—to us who believe in God there is no place where the future career of Jesus Christ seems so sure, so inevitable, so bound up with the very name and reputation of God as just at the foot of the Cross whereon He not weakly died but vehemently laid down His life.

LECTURE VII

"He Came Unto His Own, and His Own Received Him Not"

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THE charge or criticism is made that Jesus took no pains to recommend His message to the authorities in the Church: that He seemed to assume from the outset that those authorities were beyond discussion; that Jesus therefore went directly to the common people, sowing the seeds of disaffection in their minds; that He manifested towards those in authority in the Church nothing of that patience and sympathy which He lavished upon the various outcasts of society; that for the scribes and Pharisees He Himself never prayed and did not ask men to pray: in short, that from the outset until the end, Jesus did nothing to convince or conciliate those who by virtue of their authority might, had their hearts been touched, have inaugurated a more or less unanimous movement towards a more Catholic and primitive interpretation of Judaism.

This is an explicit charge made by Mr.

Montefiore. Mr. Montefiore is one of the leaders of Liberal Judaism in our day; an eminent scholar and a deeply religious and sensitive man; a Jew, indeed, whose very existence in these distracted and bitter days awakens in my own mind a question which often hovers about me, as to whether the time is not approaching, if it is not already come, when the whole Church of Christ might take up the issue between us and Judaism where Paul laid it down.

But, to keep to the matter in hand, I think this Jewish scholar, in making such a criticism, fails in his accustomed justice and discernment towards One Who founded the alien system which we Christians have been led to accept.

In what follows I should like to give reasons for holding that Jesus at a certain stage in His ministry had hopes of arousing the religious leaders to see the political situation as He saw it, and to accept the solution which seemed to Him the only way of escape from the inevitable conflict between their nationalism and the internationalism of imperial Rome. Later on in His ministry, it may well be, our Lord, on evidence which must have seemed decisive to Him, ceased to have any hope of conciliating the leaders; whereupon He went directly

to the common people. But I must believe that the refusal of the leaders to pay heed to His warnings brought grief and disappointment to Jesus. How otherwise are we to interpret those words which broke from Him one day as He came within sight of the Holy City: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest those that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, and ye would not!" I cannot read these words or hear them read without feeling that within them is the record of many an effort by Jesus to get behind some obstinate barrier, *there* at the very centre and headquarters! And such a saying as that—involuntary, human, and therefore beyond debate authentic—does not stand alone. Surely it is the same attitude, the same hope, which betrays itself in His instruction to one whom He had healed that he should go at once to the priest and perform all that Moses commanded. Indeed, I do not know how to interpret our Lord's most characteristic utterances, unless I take them to be His deliberate and even affectionate attempts to soften the temper of those in authority, and to invite them to revise those harsh prejudices and

threatening forecasts which indeed offer themselves as a solace to concerned and serious men from the bitterness of their experience and from their despair of the world.

I can hardly consider the charge as intended seriously that Jesus did not pray for those chief priests and rulers or ask His followers to pray for them. I am sure He did pray for them, He Who prayed so much and Who asked so little for Himself. We know, too, that He forbade all harsh and quick judgments and all vindictiveness: "I say unto you, Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you." And if it be still urged that Jesus did not explicitly and in so many words ask His followers to pray for the chief priests and rulers and for the scribes and Pharisees—I see nothing in that but another illustration of His perfect courtesy. We know how in our own case we may be softened by a prayer which includes us, and how we are apt to be hardened and enraged by a prayer which specifies us. And how would it have been kind and chivalrous (and we can have no further discussion with those who deny to Jesus such a personal code) to confuse the minds of simple people concerning those who occupied places of authority, until by definite teaching He had giv-

en them such a view of God and of the reach of His Charity as would enable them to feel wherein the difference lay between those rulers and Himself, and wherein, it might be, those rulers were at fault?

Besides, it strikes me as in some delicate way out of harmony with our Lord's candour and straight thinking, that He should ever recommend prayer as, so to speak, a thing by itself, and unrelated to thought and to those actions to which thought is intended to lead. If, in our Lord's view, those chief priests and rulers were wrong in their thoughts about God's intention, I feel that He would have understood it to be His duty to indicate the precise matters on which, in His view, they were at fault, not making use of prayer in a magical way, as a substitute for reason and imagination and the fair reading of history. In matters of religion there is a function of the intelligence, though, apart from sympathy with those whom we wish to help, and apart from love to God Whom we wish to serve, the mere intelligence will effect nothing.

But, besides all this, I can imagine a fine to-do from the same quarter, and with some reason, had the record stood that Jesus from time to time—beaten in argument, as it would have

been alleged—had recourse to what in the circumstances might have seemed a little malicious or a little weak, namely, asking masses of simple people to pray for those chief priests and scribes! When prayer is made a substitute for the hearty action of our reason and for the entire devotion of ourselves to a cause, prayer has become magic and an offence.

* * * * *

I am not forgetting that outburst of wrath against the scribes and Pharisees which we find in the twenty-third chapter of S. Matthew's Gospel. "Whited sepulchres, within which are dead men's bones! Hypocrites who make clean the outside of the platter!" I am not forgetting that. Nor am I forgetting those outbursts of equal heat in the fifteenth chapter, and in the eleventh of the same Gospel. But even a good Jew will think none the worse of Jesus for those passionate displays. What Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and Amos, and Micah, and Hosea, and Joel, and indeed all the prophets were right to say, it became Jesus also to say. For in each case it is not anything petty or local which has let loose the flood. In each case it is something wrong, something which any Jew, or any heathen, or any man, will declare to be wrong, that Jesus is de-

nouncing. Indeed, it is precisely *there* that our Lord is warrant for a matter which many in our day would seem in His very name to deny—our Lord is warrant for our holding that now and then there may appear in our midst something of such a kind that we can only cry against it as wrong, and hold those who practise it as for the time being our enemies and the enemies of God. But it was not against the sins of the religious leaders of His time only that our Lord inveighed without measure. The same wrath and anxiety for what would come upon men leapt to His lips as He reflected on what a world we all live in—as upon a day when He learned that John the Baptist had been put to death in prison, and that life had gone on very much as usual, and that there before Him lay Bethsaida and Chorazin dead asleep, though they had seen things and heard things which would have startled Sodom and Gomorrah!

No: all that we need say is that in our Lord's view there was something peculiarly odious in assuming the approval or consent of God for behaviour which offended the moral sense of even average men. Where rulers and chief priests maintained such a behaviour, Jesus condemned rulers and chief priests. But

Jesus was equally unsparing in His reference to *us* who later should bear His name and represent Him in the world. For where will you find words of such whip-cord as those which He addressed, not to scribes and Pharisees, but to people like ourselves who make our profession: "Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savour"—if the salt, that is to say, has lost the taste and force of salt—"wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill, but men cast it out."

But the most convincing way of defending our Lord's attitude to the ruling persons of His time, and of showing how patient and conciliatory was His bearing as often as He was approached on serious matters with what looked like seriousness, is to give one or two illustrations.

Recall what precisely it was that Jesus came to propose, to offer to mankind, and, in the first place, to His own people. "He came," we read, "preaching the Gospel of God," the Good News of God. And in the view of Jesus, the very thing that made God God, was, and is, that He loved and loves the whole world, that He has no favourites, no respect of persons. That, we say, was, and is, the message

of Jesus: "He came to seek and to save that which was lost." Were we asked to repeat at once, and almost without reflecting, the very words which seem to us most adequately to state the terms and the method and the reach of the love of God, we should say, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Now the only change I would have men make in their next repetition of those precious and profound words is that they shall henceforward put the accent upon *the world.* For that is the original thing, the new and arresting thing in the religion of Jesus: that God loved *the world.*

And now consider the manner of speech, of argument, and of entreaty, by which Jesus sought to convince the religious leaders of His time that that, and nothing short of that, was what the religion of which they were the recognised exponents had from the beginning been meaning to say and had indeed said.

I recall two illustrations.

Once upon a time a certain lawyer—a certain devotee of the law—a fair representative, that is to say, of the accepted religion—a certain lawyer stood up and challenged Jesus:

"Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" To whom our Lord replied, "What is written in the Law? How readest thou?" That is, in effect, to say, "What do you yourself think?" And the lawyer answering said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." To which our Lord assented, saying, "Thou hast answered right. This do and thou shalt live." That is once again in effect to say: You know already everything that is necessary. But the lawyer desiring to justify himself said unto Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Whereupon our Lord told him a story, the one effect of which was once again to send the question back to the bar of the man's own heart and conscience and good sense. You know the story: but here it is:

"A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, which both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half-dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds,

pouring on them oil and wine; and he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow he took out two coins, and gave them to the host and said, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee. *Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers?* And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. And Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

That is to say—Who, do you yourself think, acted the part of neighbour to the man who needed help? It is as though our Lord had said—Let us put out of our minds all our prejudices and traditions, let us resist the temptation to use our intelligence to corrupt our heart and will. Let our heart, let the deepest and the best thing in us have its way, and give its vote. For that vote, the vote which we cast face to face with these two alternatives—and this is the world-shaking message of Jesus—that vote is the will of God, the very beat of the heart of God.

It is as though our Lord had said, Were you yourself, apart from those influences which embarrass the free play of human souls, left to interpret the will of God, you would make no mistake. You would never be satisfied with passing by, or holding aloof, or pretending not to see. You would take a leap in the light, in the compulsion of your own warm heart, and

take the Samaritan to your breast. For Christianity, according to Jesus, is as old as man; nay, in the view of Jesus, Christianity is older than man; for man at his best is the fruit of it.

And there our Lord is working His way to the unveiling of what was the basis of His own faith and hope and love—I mean the very nature of God Himself.

It is this that is unveiled in the story which we call the Parable of the Prodigal Son. On such sacred ground one shrinks from saying anything unusual. But there is no doubt that to call it "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" is to stop short of its full glory. For the hero of the story is neither the son who never wandered nor the son who wandered far and came back. The hero is the father, who loved them both.

The teaching is so obvious, so deep and final, that we wonder that the very telling did not melt the hearts of those who still clung to local and exclusive thoughts of God. And yet we need not wonder. After nineteen hundred years we still hesitate to commit ourselves to the blessed flood of this great idea of God. But the teaching of the parable, I say, is obvious. It is a story intended not in the first instance to throw light upon the nature of man, but

to throw light upon the nature of God, and upon His responsibilities as God. There is no need for me to repeat a story every word of which we know. But I would have you notice —against the criticism of Mr. Montefiore, with which we introduced this study—I would have you notice in the parable the generosity of the father towards the elder son—that elder son who represents the Jewish Church and nation. With what gentleness the father pleads with him not to treat with harshness his younger brother, the Gentile world! With what tact the father seems even to agree that the elder son has good reason to be angry and to stand aloof! And yet how he pleads with the elder son not to display any harshness or reproach; nay, not to feel harsh or reproachful! How he asks him not to misunderstand the great joy which he is feeling over his younger child's return! How he assures him that it is not that he loves the younger more than him, still less is it that he loves the younger because the younger has been foolish. Thus the father argues, urges, appeals: will he not come in and sit at the table and share in the joy which the father has prepared? "But he would not go in. And he answered and said to his father: Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and

I never transgressed a commandment of thine, and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son" (but why "this thy son," why not "this my brother!") "as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

To whom the father answered, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was meet to make merry and be glad; for this *thy brother*"—yes, if we will not say it, God will say it—"was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

There, as in the earlier illustration, Jesus is appealing to the man behind the nationalist, behind the Jew, appealing to him to honour and yield himself up to that final humaneness which Jesus assumes is lurking in all hearts.

It is a story with the very accent of an earlier story, this earlier story, the most tender story in the Old Testament, the story, I mean, which forms the book of Jonah. "Go preach in Nineveh," said the Lord to Jonah. "To Nineveh!" cried Jonah with horror. "To Nineveh, which trampled upon our soil, which harried us and outraged us! Never!" And he took ship to Tarshish: that is to say, he went as far as he

could in precisely the opposite direction. But, as I have often remarked, any world that God has made is likely to be a round world, so that the further you run away from Him the more inevitably are you coming back. And Jonah, out at sea, in a storm, with death staring him in the face, learned some things he would never have known had he remained at home. They were all heathen men in the boat, and yet they were better men than Jonah, as Jonah himself had to confess. When things were at their worst, those heathen sailors could at least pray to their gods. But Jonah with his bad conscience could not pray to his God. And so the storm deepened until there was no hope. Whereupon Jonah, breaking down utterly, came upon his own greatness. "Take me up and cast me into the sea: for it is because of me that this evil has come upon you." But those heathen men would not cast him out: though he had been ready in his comfortable home to cast them all out and think he was doing God service. But at last even to those heathen there seemed no other way. And Jonah for the hardness of his heart was sent into captivity. There, as the story puts it, he came upon the very roots of things, the very elements which make this world a moral order.

And God called once again upon his servant Jonah, that is, upon the Jewish people, ready now surely for some better obedience. But it was the old command, the old task: for we cannot compound with God, offering Him something which we can spare in the place of something which He demands. It was the old command: "Go, preach in Nineveh." To which Jonah in effect made answer: "Yes, Lord, to Nineveh I shall go: but it is my own message that I shall deliver, the historic message of Thine ancient people." And he went. "Thirty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" So he proclaimed in the streets. And behold a strange thing happened. Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah—to Jonah's disappointment. For when Nineveh repented, God repented—as He promises He will in such circumstances. Whereupon Jonah was angry and wanted to die rather than look on at the happiness of the Ninevites. And the little, poignant, tender book—a book which we know our Lord studied deeply, a book which just falls short of the greatness of His own parable—the little book closes on this note: "Yesterday you were tired and smitten with the sun. I caused a gourd to spring up to shade you from the heat. The gourd withered. Whereupon

you became angry, angry and sore for the loss of a gourd, since through the loss of the gourd you, a solitary human being, were likely to suffer more or less.

"Well now, how do you think I feel with regard to Nineveh, whose people are not all of them ruthless soldiers; Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than one hundred and twenty thousand little children, children so tiny that they cannot discern between their right hand and their left?"

That once again was the question which God had long since put to His ancient people. That question had received no answer. It was that same question which our Lord in His total ministry raised once for all, addressing it to the same quarter.

How can God act towards children who want to come back, except to welcome them? Nay, how can God act towards children who need Him, even though they seem content to be without Him, towards children who are subtly but inevitably and tragically moving away from the recalling reminiscences of some finer day, how, except to go out and seek them, withstanding them in their further apostasy, appealing to them in the name of obscure memories not yet dead, and in the name of their

own recurring sadness face to face with life; how can God act towards these except to keep a light burning in the window and the door upon the latch, in view of the hour which, in the philosophy of faith and hope and love, will one day strike, when, softened, it may be, by the contradictions of experience, and afraid of the darkness which gathers inevitably upon the sensual life, they shall "come to themselves" and "hate the coarser food!" What can God do, if He be God indeed, except what Christ Jesus in His total ministry of word and deed and doom declared God had done and will do—throw open the door, though it was never barred to their return, and set out to meet them coming back!

Surely it is not impossible so to state or to restate the proposal of Jesus that, just here, Jew and Christian may in the liberty and rapture of a new and final insight into the heart of God, look into each other's eyes, the veil of the Temple rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

EPILEGOMENA

"So Is the Kingdom of God, as If a Man Should Cast Seed Upon the Ground; and Should Sleep and Rise Night and Day, and the Seed Should Spring and Grow Up, He Knoweth Not How"

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"So Is the Kingdom of God, as If a Man Should Cast Seed Upon the Ground; and Should Sleep and Rise Night and Day, and the Seed Should Spring and Grow Up, He Knoweth Not How"

In the New Testament as we have it, we have, reflected as in a mirror, the life of the Church during a period of probably not less than one hundred and fifty years, reckoning from the time when Jesus passed away into the unseen world.

In the lapse of those five generations changes had taken place such as cannot but take place in the history of any living thing which is to survive. There are those who, contemplating such changes, will do nothing but deplore them. They will have it that what we see in the New Testament as it proceeds is the steady obscuration of an early simplicity and directness: that once again Jesus has fallen into the hands of men who have misunderstood Him, who have despised and rejected His tender and direct appeal, who have made it the point of departure for their own pas-

sions and prejudices; so that at their hands, He whom the common people heard gladly has been, in figure, once more crucified, dead, and buried. Such people quote the Sermon on the Mount; or they recall those parables in which Jesus bids us take life without suspicion and as it comes, putting always the fine interpretation upon things which happen, all in a general confidence that life is good, good sometimes even on the surface—and that, when on the surface things seem harsh, beneath the surface, and with a firm hold of God's intention, life always feels abundantly worth while. People quote those sayings and appeals and incidents which seem to them to embody the pure Gospel of the Love of God, as though the Love of God were a reckless and undiscriminating thing; and they contrast them with the complicated and struggling language of later parts of the New Testament. The one is so clear, the other so difficult: in the one case everything is so kind and inviting; in the other, so anxious and severe: the earlier message making its appeal to faith; the later resting largely upon fear, recommending safeguards and imposing restrictions—with the consequence that there are many in our day, of every level of intelligence, who declare that such develop-

ment as there is in the New Testament—the growth of the Church and of a system of ideas —was a mistake and has been a misfortune.

A little reflection, however, should be enough to bring home to us all that what such people are requiring—namely, that any beautiful revelation as to the meaning of this life of ours shall remain an obvious and self-supporting thing, is something which is simply not granted. Any new thing coming into this world or offering itself to man, if it means to stay, must, in a real sense, fight for its life and take on a body from the very struggle. Because, to say no more, the human heart is already occupied; and any new thing which would find a place, still more inevitably any new thing which, like the proposal of Jesus, would have the chief place, must either come to terms with the ancient principles of the human heart, or, when those ancient principles of the human heart are intractable, must take means to cast them out and to establish itself in the vacated place.

There are many, in fact, who hold that it was not our Lord's intention to found a Church, that it was certainly not His intention to found such a Church as has in fact come into being in the world; that the likeli-

hood is that He would have had those who believed in Him and who understood His message, go through the villages and towns of His own country, and, yielding to the spirit which was inherent all the time in the message, to other peoples until it might be the whole world had become aware of Him. And yet there is difficulty in not believing that Jesus foresaw some such movement towards a Society for the cherishing of His ideas after He Himself should have gone; and that, especially in the later days of His ministry, He devoted Himself to precise and intimate instructions to His disciples, such as might enable them, in the stress that was coming, to survive. It would be altogether too much to claim that the Church even for two centuries had proceeded in all matters with perfect wisdom, and that it never offended His spirit. But, for myself, it seems clear that some time before the close of His life Jesus foresaw that His Kingdom would be established on the earth, not, in the first instance, by what we call a mass movement; that rather His word and message and body of ideas, embraced in the first instance by men and women who had their own deep reasons for loving Him, would, through them, enter into the historical forces of human life.

But perhaps the best way to account for the existence of the early Church is simply to say that what happened was inevitable. In every great crisis, when men are at their wits' end and are confronted with facts and prospects of which they have had no previous experience, what happens is inevitable. This is not to say that what happens is the very best; it is only to say that in such a crisis men fall back upon and accept the wisdom of certain instincts, and feel their way.

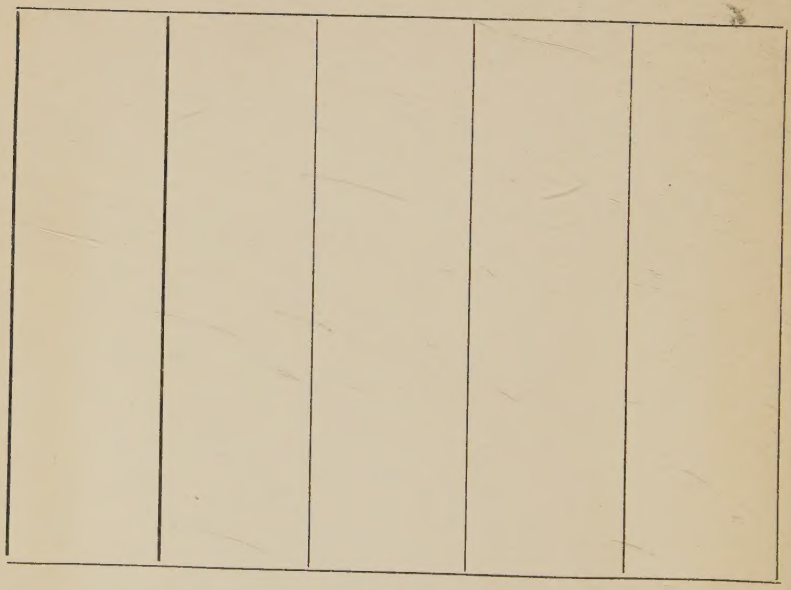
We can trace in the New Testament what happened after the death of Jesus; and we feel that in all the circumstances it could not have been otherwise. We learn that the death of Jesus seemed to the small body of disciples to be the end of everything. We are left to suppose that they returned to their homes, and proposed to themselves to resume the work which they had laid down to follow Jesus. We can detect in the story of Thomas a certain bitterness, when some of his old friends suggested to him that perhaps even yet all was not over. And in the story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus—a story, in my own view, of first importance for its account of the process by which the early disciples let go their traditional prejudices in order to grasp the

true and final understanding of the Messiah—we have a story, simple, natural, and convincing, of how plain men rose into an attitude of hope and energy from sadness over the passing of a beautiful dream.

It was S. Paul who gave the first disciples an outlet, healing their hearts with a great task. It was he who taught them not to spend their days in the sadness of mere memory, or in looking with a certain subtle vindictiveness for God's vengeance upon the age which had put their Master to a shameful death. It was S. Paul who roused the Jerusalem Church to proceed, or to allow others to proceed, upon the Message of Jesus, convincing them that the only way to make good, it might be their own earlier apostasy and laggard obedience, was now to go out into the whole world proclaiming to mankind what Jesus had said about God and about the meaning of their own history—even if they themselves, like their Master, should encounter the hostility of men; and even if, in the end, having found life a deepening loneliness, they should be compelled to pass out of it with that violence and glory which they had witnessed in the death of their Lord on Calvary.

THE END

BOOK TO BE RETURNED



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